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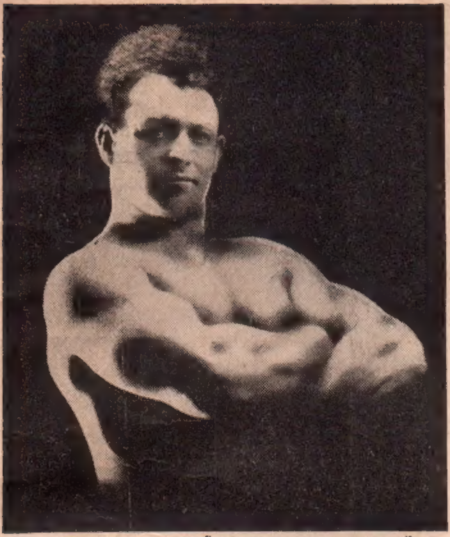

SIEGMUND BREITBART "THE SUPERMAN OF THE AGES"

Most people think I was born strong, in fact they remark, "It was born in him." Let me tell you I was *not*. From the time I was born I was the same as any other human being—normal. My talents were always directed toward physical development. I liked to lift, pull, perform feats of strength and to exhibit a huge muscle. Sort of natural for a boy, isn't it? As I grew older, I gave more time and study to the scientific development of strength.

A Different and Better Way!

I can spare you many a wearisome hour. I tried all manner of courses and none came up to my expectations. Naturally I could only resort to my own resources for the development of a practical scientific course which would satisfy myself. I learned by actually performing. Thus I am able to offer a course which is fundamentally sound, tried and true. I don't ask you to accept something that isn't practical.

Breitbart Reveals It All

You can acquire strength and power as I did, by simply following the methods I outline to you. And in a remarkably short time! Then you too will say, "I didn't think it possible."

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I am talking from the bottom of my heart. I am telling you only the plain truth. I bend half inch iron bands around my arm as a piece of ribbon. Bend horseshoes with my hands more easily than the village Blacksmith. Drive nails thru oak planks and metal. Support four thousand pounds of Vermont granite on my chest while six husky men slug away at it with heavy sledge hammers. Is it beyond reason that I am continually referred to as "The Super-man of the Ages?"

Do You Want Strength?

Ask for it—say "Breitbart, I want health, vitality, and pep." I will build a body possessing the super power to bend, break or crush at the mind's command. That security in knowing that within those two arms of yours there is untold power—is yours, if you will follow my instruction. My course is simpler, quicker and more positive in its results, than any other. There isn't a red-blooded man today who doesn't want strength.

Don't Wait for this Book

The demand for it has so for exceeded my expectations, that I have already twice increased the print order, since it first went to press. It is the most remarkable and finished book on strength ever published. Contains photographs of me performing those unique feats of strength, which have caused countless prominent people to attest their genuineness. Take this book, turn to page 37. An actual photograph of me driving nails thru oak planks and metal. Now page 21. Biting a steel chain in half with my teeth. On page 39, I am supporting a moving merry-go-round mounted with six men, on my chest. On pages 32 and 33 the motorcyle race while I support the motordrome on my chest. I possess that which I teach. If you want a new start in life, ask for my book, "Muscular power." It is yours. Don't hesitate—All I ask is that you enclose 10¢ to cover postage and handling.

FREE *Do You Know Your Own Strength?*

Something new — unique. Breitbart's famous muscle meter! Shows the size of my muscle. Compare yours with mine. See the difference. Use it three months later and see it then. Be a HE MAN. *Send for it.* Yours is waiting.

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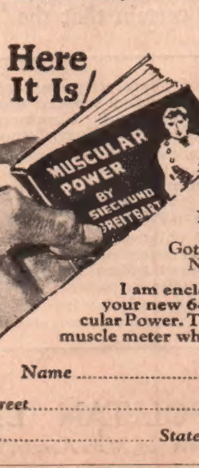

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Volume 50
Number 6

Fair Warning!

LOOK out for January colds! This is the time of year when colds are most prevalent. Seeds are now being sown for deaths from pneumonia that will occur in January, February and March. These diseases which blot out an average of 150,000 lives a year in the United States and Canada frequently develop from neglected colds. Out of every seven who get pneumonia one person dies. As many people die each year from pneumonia as from tuberculosis. Year after year the same thing happens.

"Just a cold!" But what will it lead to? —The first signs of influenza, pneumonia, and other dangerous diseases are often mistaken for "just a cold."

Do not neglect a cold. A cold in the head is not a simple, trifling annoyance but a real disease with a medical name—coryza. In addition to the danger that pneumonia may develop, a cold often leads to chronic catarrh of the nasal passages, to ear trouble ending in deafness, to chronic bronchitis and inflammation of the bony cavities of the face. A neglected cold may even prepare the way for serious heart trouble.

The first noticeable symptoms of diphtheria, typhoid fever, measles, scarlatina, whooping cough or smallpox may appear as a cold. A person suffering from what seems to be an innocent cold may pass on to someone else a fatal attack of one of these diseases. If you or your children are suffering from colds stay away from other people until you are certain that the "cold" is not an infectious disease. This decent precaution will prevent many serious epidemics and save many lives.

A cold is an inflammation of the mucous membrane which settles upon the point of least resistance—the nose, throat, chest, or gastro-intestinal tract. Sudden changes in temperature, drafts and exposure to damp and cold, breathing stale air and street dust—these are direct causes of colds.

Lack of fresh air and sufficient exercise to keep the skin and body healthy, lack of sleep and rest, over-indulgence in rich indigestible food—these are indirect causes of colds.

To take cold easily is to advertise that your living habits are wrong. By following simple health rules you are likely to keep well. But if in spite of all your care, you do take a cold—do not treat it lightly. See your doctor. Remember, it is not a sign of weakness but a mark of wisdom never to neglect a cold.

The amount of absenteeism in large business establishments is seldom realized until the facts are thoroughly reviewed. Common colds are among the chief sources of loss of time.

In a group of about 8,000 clerical employees of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company at the Home Office, records show that colds which involve disability for work affect 2 out of every 5 employees during the course of a year.

Among school children, colds are probably the cause of more absenteeism than any other illness—with consequent falling back in grades and extra expense to the tax payer.

Medical supervision of schools is becoming more thorough from year to year and is doing much to prevent serious epidemics and thus save lives. Parents should cooperate with school authorities in working to stamp out these minor illnesses which frequently have fatal consequences.

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company has prepared a pamphlet, "Prevention of Pneumonia" which will be mailed free to everyone interested in guarding against this dangerous disease which ranks second only to heart disease in the death rate. Send for it.

Permission is gladly given to any individual, organization or periodical to reprint this page wherever it may serve the interests of community welfare.

HALEY FISKE, *President.*

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ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

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The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

Contents for January 30th, 1925, Issue

A Fine Mess *A Complete Novelette* . . . . **Thomson Burtis** 1
Great Lakes—a forced landing in winter, starvation and—"The Cat."

Sissie . . . . **Obe Robertson** 27
West—some threats are softly spoken.

Piegan War Parties *Early Days* . . . . . **Eugene Cunningham** 31

Mannikin Talk . . . . **William Byron Mowery** 32
Canada—*Adoue* understood its message.

Mountains of Mystery *A Five-Part Story Part I* . . . . **Arthur O. Friel** 36
Venezuela—the guides abandon the expedition.

The Macbane is Dead . . . . **Fred Halsey** 59
Wars—and a fighting family passed.

Slants on Life *The Dog Star* . . . . **Bill Adams** 63

Gun Shy .. . . **James Parker Long** 64
North country—a camera can't lie.

The Altar of the Legion *A Three-Part Story Conclusion* . . **Farnham Bishop and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur** 70
Old England—horror and dismay fell on the Saxon fleet.

**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

(*Continued on next page*)

(Continued from preceding page)

Songs *Verse* . . . . **Berton Braley** 104

Dry Stick . . . . **Alanson Skinner** 105
Indian country—even a snake is useful.

The Hand of Allah ***A Complete Novelette*** . . . . **George E. Holt** 108
Morocco—international intrigue.

The Camp-Fire **A free-to-all meeting-place for readers, writers and adventurers** 175

Camp-Fire Stations 182

Lost Trails 182

Various Practical Services Free to Any Reader 183

Ask Adventure 184
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Old Songs That Men Have Sung 191

The Trail Ahead 192

Headings . . . . **George M. Richards**

Cover Design . . . . **F. Eltonhead**

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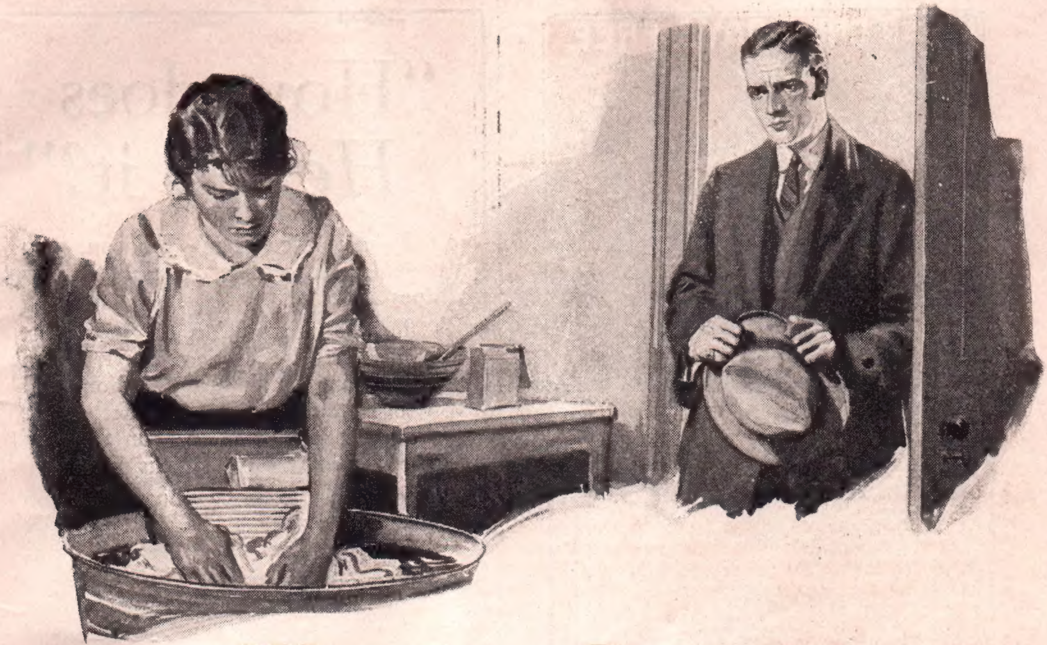
SOLD as a slave, dishonored, dragged across the Sudan with an iron ring through his shoulder, still *Vero Sa*, the *spahi*, was faithful to his salt. "THE TOOL OF ALLAH," a complete novelette by Georges Surdez in the next issue.

WITH the Canadian Expeditionary Force in France. "FROM RAMSHOOT TO RÉMY," a novelette by Douglas Oliver, complete in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

***Adventure* is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**



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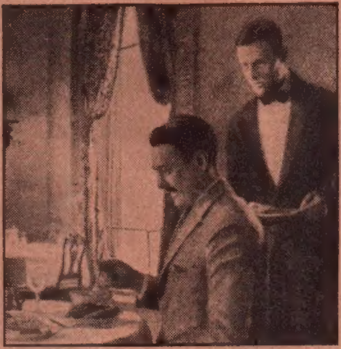

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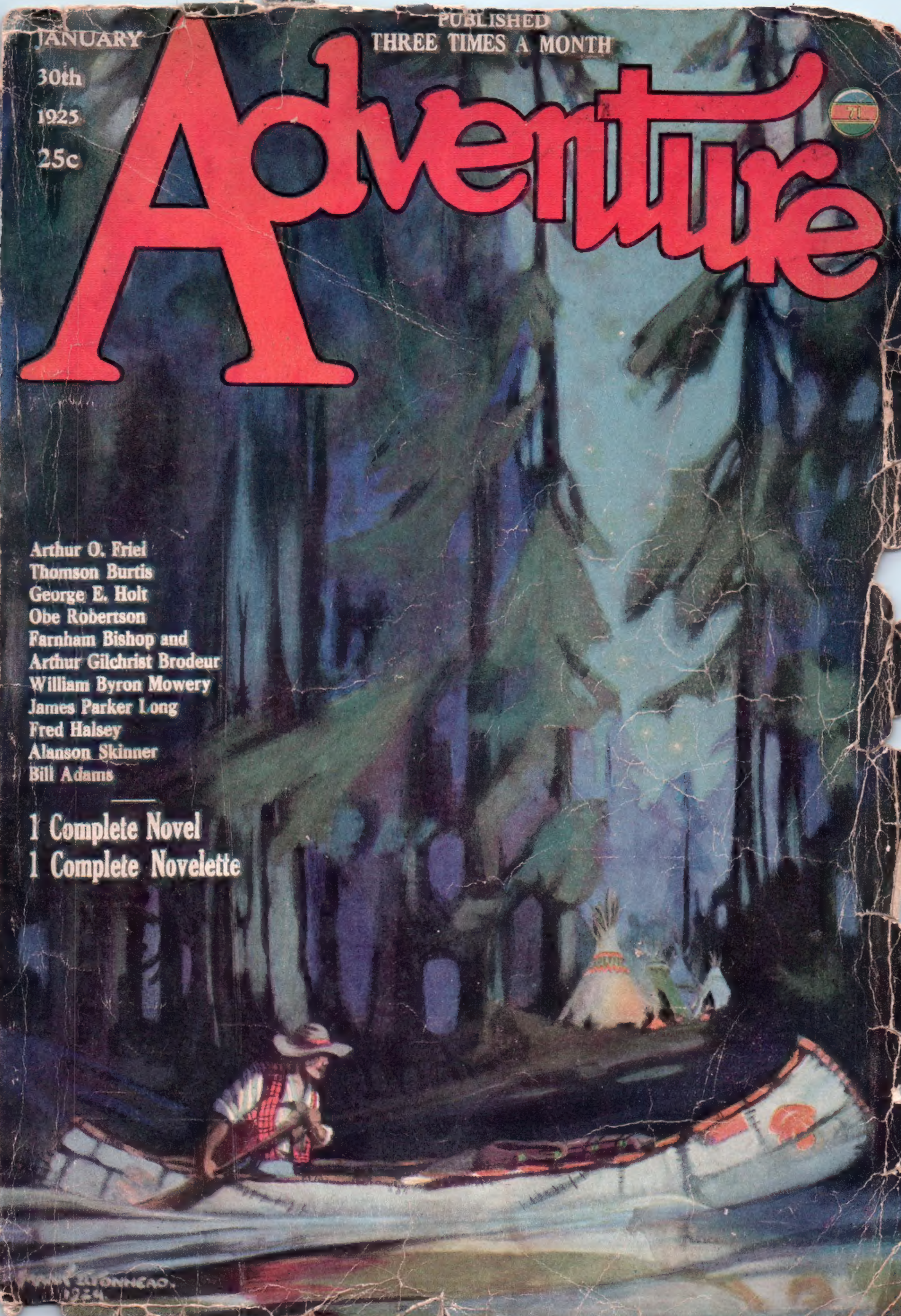

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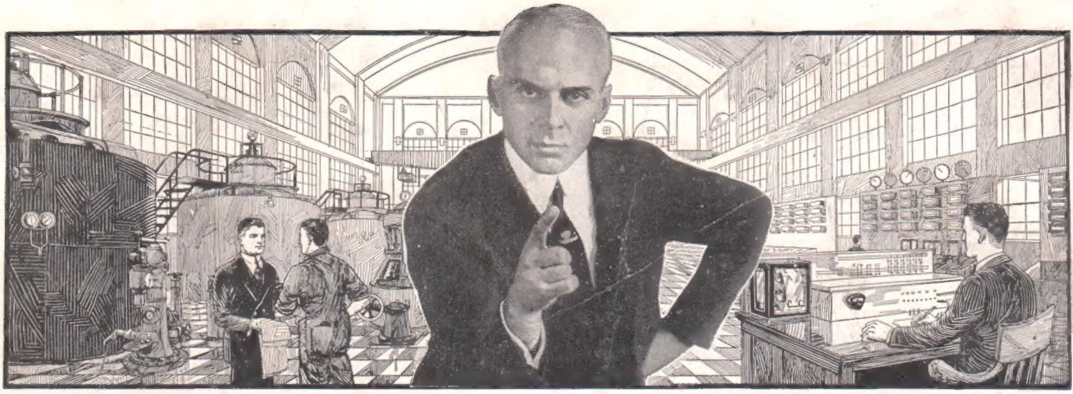

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A FINE MESS

by THOMSON BURTIS

Author of "Groody Among the Gushers," "The Lone Raider," etc.

I ADMIT that I resemble a rattlesnake in at least two particulars, although I have enemies who can see, with the naked eye, additional points in common. One of the mob who would not hold himself down to two would be "Red" Austin, sometimes known as "Cat," who was, in his prime, about the best low and lofty hijacker extant. That redheaded outlaw could tell you plenty, maybe.

Be that as it may, however, the two characteristics to which I plead guilty are: Firstly, that I am thinner than any respectable rattler of anywhere near my age; and the fact that I believe in giving warning, when possible, in order to afford my prospective victims a chance to break for cover if they like.

So I tell you now, in advance, that I am about to break out in a rash of words. My tongue, for the nonce, is loose on both ends and running on ball bearings in the middle. The "public prints"—I love that flossy phrase—got the thing befogged, bescrambled and highly bespattered with extraneous garbage. Some of them pictured me as a Machiavellian hero fresh from the primeval lava whose gigantic physical prowess and massive brain were responsible for all that happened.

On the starboard paw, a string of passionately pink-headlined sheets with pacifist inclinations held me up as a sample of the ribald rubes who should be kicked out of the army, the army being responsible for all wars and battles, including the Scandinavian and domestic brands. To the best of my knowledge and belief, both angles on the racket are wrong.

"Dink" Watrous, a flyer and likewise a lying limb of the —— who should be lopped off without delay, ecstatically fed the press junk anent an experience of mine down in Farifus, Texas, a couple of years ago, and another little shindig which took place while I was ferrying a big three-motored Tankwing from New York to Houston, Texas. Between all these things, everybody, including myself, got pretty well scrambled, mentally, trying to figure out what *did* happen.

So I'm going to tell you the inside of it. As a matter of fact, although I did run into

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that famous hijacker Cat Austin, and a few other things, I fell into the thing through pure, unadulterated dumbness, and got out of it by dumb luck. As a souvenir I carried a temporary dent in my hitherto unscathed heart and—gentlemen, hush! how I did get fooled, one way and another!

II

TO START with my name is Evans—John Evans, usually called "Slim." I can't imagine any reason why I should be called Slim unless it's because I'm six feet four inches tall, and so thin I can hide behind a candlestick. A view of me from either side resembles a playing card in the same position.

In order to give you all the dope, I further warn you that the principal character of this yarn is, strangely enough, *not* a handsome miracle worker, who could knock Jack Dempsey and all his sparring partners loose with one wave of the little finger, make Sherlock Holmes look like a square-toed New York plainclothes man, and who is and always has been as pure as the snow on a convent roof.

I'm just a big country boy from Utah; I've rambled around a little, here and there about the world, for the last few years, but I often think the more I see the less I know, and the older I grow the more crippled becomes my brain.

My present occupation is being a flyer in Uncle Sam's diminutive Air Service. Yes, there are a few hundred—under a thousand—of us left. Between wrecks and Congress, we're soon going to get to the place where some senator is going to say—

"Where's the Air Service?"

And the chief is going to reply—

"There isn't any. We picked him up with a blotter this morning."

I've been in it ever since 1917; had some fun over in France and have been drifting around in this country between the border patrol down in Texas, the Mechanics' School at Donovan Field, and other spots both yon and hither. A few months ago I got my release from the school and was ordered to Selden Field, Michigan, for duty with the Pursuit Group. It tickled me, although I don't like cold country in the winter.

Flying these little single-seated pursuit ships is a load of fun, particularly after several years of flying big two- and three-motored aerial lumber wagons such as I had been condemned to. Good ships, but mild. About as much kick as orange pekoe tea.

Now that you know me, so to speak, I'll make a running dive into the yarn.

We had some DeHaviland bombers at Selden for cross-country work, and one fine Friday in January I secured one of the boats to make a cross-country trip to Milwaukee. No particular reason why I should go to Milwaukee, except that in my mind it had sort of a halo of suds around it. I had never been there, and a girl I'd liked during the war was living there. So I went.

The town looked all right, but I couldn't find any beer and the girl had got fat. Then, on Sunday, when I was supposed to leave, it started snowing and I was held up indefinitely.

Monday morning at eleven I was sleeping very soundly, having had a tough night. The telephone jangled a few times, but I didn't answer it. I can think of few things as important as sleep, and never get up until I'm ready unless it's compulsory, like certain army customs such as reveille, or a fire. I mean when the fire is in the building I'm occupying. When I'm pounding my ear consecutively I wouldn't open one eye to watch Lady Godiva taking her morning ride. I haven't yet decided whether I'm glad or sorry that I didn't answer the phone that morning.

At two in the afternoon I regained consciousness, got up, and found a telegram under my door. It read as follows:

> Report at headquarters not later than 12 noon Tuesday for courtmartial proceedings. SIMS.

I was considerably surprized. I was to be tried by courtmartial for conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman, I knew very well, but the sudden speeding up of the frolic was a new one on me. I'd been caught in a dive out on the Barbary Coast of Detroit, along the Detroit River, a month before. They had nothing on me, much, and I figured I'd get away all right. It wasn't as bad as it sounds—I'll tell you about it before I finish this. That's one of the times I ran into the Cat.

Come to think about it, I might as well let you in on it right now. Here goes:

III

PROHIBITION has been responsible for a lot of things, from Rum Row, out there along the eastern coast, to a lot of rotten vaudeville jokes. But I'll venture to say that there are few new growths on the body of the country or its environs, including even the Bahamas, more remarkable than the row of towns just outside Detroit, along the Detroit River.

The bootleggers' motor boats dart back and forth between Canada and the U. S. A. day and night, and those three towns are their headquarters. You can imagine, perhaps, what they've turned into.

I'll swear it would knock you dead. At night one can walk along the main street of one of them, and see nothing but ordinary frame houses, usually dark. Few signs of life. But just start anywhere, and knock on a door. If some one is along that they know, you'll get in this innocent looking house. And then just go from door to door, missing none of them, right on down the street.

Every one selling—every one a joint of some kind or other. Here one sees a place where a coon orchestra is playing; next house only a bar peopled by rum-runners; in the next women. The scum of the earth are in the traffic, as underlings, and smart, well-connected outlaws are up higher. "Bootlegging wars" knock off a few men every week, shooting scrapes in the bars supply the newspapers with frequent stories, and vice is everywhere.

There is nothing appealing about it. The places are as crude and rough as the men who form their principal clientele. In a half hour of lounging around any one of them, listening to the conversation of the customers, the average man can hear enough to stagger him if he thinks that 1924 is unique in the matter of cleanness and law enforcement.

Some respectable citizens would be nauseated, others dumfounded, still others utterly unbelieving, if they could listen in for a few minutes. There is something appallingly cynical in the matter-of-fact way in which murder, vice in its most revolting forms, and systematic lawbreaking are taken absolutely for granted.

Bribery and corruption are matters of course; hijacking is "smart;" the very dregs of debauchery are succulent morsels to supply conversational topics to the degenerates who form so large a portion of the floating population; murder is a passing emergency, not to be taken too seriously if gotten away with; the king of the section is the bootlegger who represents the Canada breweries and paid income tax on $96,000 last year. Expert income tax men peeled it down to that figure.

Lately the smarter runners have turned to drugs as a side line, on account of the greater profits. Dives of every conceivable description flourish. Denizens of the underworld have taken over the communities, and federal men go five miles to lunch to avoid ground glass and poison in their food.

From the time I hit Selden Field I had heard about this Barbary Coast of Detroit. I am an incurably curious mortal, always poking my long nose into anything new or alluring. I'll give a few hours to any thug, crook, capitalist, traveler, cowboy, or any one else who can tell me about anything with which I am unfamiliar.

Naturally, I determined to take a look at Rum Runners' Row as soon as possible. In a little while I ran into a newspaper man who knew the ropes, and the day following, at five in the afternoon, I was introduced to Mr. Fred Liebjeck, one of the leading runners, down at his dock along the river. His house was right behind us, about a hundred yards off the main street. The lane was cluttered with cars, mostly Ford sedans, and as tough a looking crew of thin-lipped city gangsters as I've ever seen was loitering around, waiting for the boat to come in.

This was broad daylight, mind you. Fred, a square-jawed powerfully built Pole who was rather goodlooking except for cold, green eyes, explained that the Canadian brewers and distillers paid a lookout in the middle of the river, whose duty it was to watch for the revenue boat which streams lonesomely up and down the river, trying to stop the bootleggers. It's got as much chance by itself, as it would have to stop the water from flowing over Niagara Falls. I could see the lookout through Fred's glasses.

"Here she comes!" said Fred suddenly.

I took a peek through the glasses. A big motor boat, its bow high out of the water, was streaking from the Canadian shore. Ahead of it several hundred yards were two more smaller boats, each holding a man at the wheel and a gunman clearing the way. Without interference of any kind they came over, that beautiful cargo boat just kissing the water.

There were eighty-five cases on board—and that was the eighth trip that day for just one of the hundreds of gentry who are in this pleasing traffic.

A policeman in uniform, drunk, mingled with the crowd and watched the liquor being unloaded in the boathouse. In thirty minutes the cargo had been distributed among the drivers, who paid $45 a case for it, and made off to sell it around Detroit at $7 a quart.

I'm a nut about boats, and so, it happens, was Fred. Likewise guns. He had a marvelous collection. We shot at cans in the water a while, and finally he invited me for a spin in his reserve boat, which he claimed would do close to forty-five miles an hour. The first boat had gone back for another cargo.

It was nearly dark when we started. We cruised around in the river, and were just starting home when something went wrong with the ignition. Fred told me cheerily that he could fix it in half an hour.

It was very dark by the time he straightened up and announced that the job was done. He listened closely, and then said—

"A boat coming toward us."

It was—and fast. In a moment a blinding searchlight threw us into bold relief, just for an instant. A long black boat came up alongside, three men in it almost indistinguishable in the gloom. One was very tall.

"Cat Austin, by ——!" breathed Fred, and I'll swear my hair waved with excitement.

The boat carried a machine gun mounted in the stern, and even in the darkness I could see that it had a Liberty motor—an ordinary four hundred and fifty horsepower, twelve cylinder aviation engine. Three guns were trained on us.

A masked man climbed into our boat, and I knew I was looking at the nationally famous outlaw who for the last three months had been terrorizing the whole Detroit district, with particular reference to the bootleggers. I got the impression of a fairly tall, athletically built man, with a square jaw and cruel mouth below his mask. Blondish hair showed underneath his cap, and a dudish red mustache adorned his upper lip. He didn't look as if the mustache was sapping his strength any, either.

"Not a —— thing aboard, eh?" he snarled.

He flashed a pocket searchlight at us, looking longest at me. Then:

"Fred Liebjeck, eh? And not running anything this trip. Empty your pockets—and it's Red Austin talkin' to yuh!"

The last sentence was articulated in a perfectly matter-of-fact way, as if in itself it would have the desired effect and needed no emphasis. Fred obediently emptied his pockets.

"Only thirty dollars, Austin," he said with elation in his voice, "and no liquor! Kind o' tough——"

"Don't talk out o' your turn!"

There was concentrated viciousness in the words of the disappointed hijacker. He thrust the money in his pocket and snarled—

"You need a lesson!"

With that he gave Fred a terrific blow with the barrel of his gun, and knocked him cold. Then he kicked the unconscious body.

There was a cold ferocity in the man that made me crawl. I was literally quivering as I sat there. I'd have given my hopes of heaven—which aren't worth much, at that—for a one minute brawl with that thug, but what could I do, sitting under three guns?

They let me keep my ten dollars—never seemed to think of me—and made off. I revived Fred, and soon we were on our way back. From up and down the river came the *put-put* of the motor boats. The bootleggers were at work, but Red Austin was abroad.

Fred told me a good deal more about the man, some inside dope that the wild tales in the newspapers hadn't mentioned. He had come from nowhere, this Austin, and in his long black boat that was miles an hour faster than anything on the river he had preyed on the bootleggers.

The average load was worth four thousand dollars, and he had been known to knock off four in a night. Six murders had been his toll so far. That machine gun spoke at the slightest provocation. Now when the searchlight played over a boat it was the signal for all hands to stick 'em up. For Austin didn't bluff.

At first, the mysterious outlaw only preyed on boats carrying booze across. Then, one memorable night, four masked men with Austin himself at their head cleaned out five dives along the river-front, hook, line, and sinker. They robbed the free-spending guests and the owners, confiscated upwards of two hundred cases of liquor, killed Danny Gerahty, who attempted resistance, and vanished.

No one knew who he was, or who was in his gang. He did get tips—witness his knocking off of a truckload of liquor bound for Detroit. He and an assistant boarded it right in Detroit, stuck a gun in the driver's ribs, forced him to help them transfer it to another truck in an alley within a block of a police station, and left him bound and gagged, hidden in his own truck, and parked the truck right across the street from the police station.

Exploits like that, with a curious theatrical quality about them and an impish sense of humor, had helped make his name a byword. Detroit papers were full of him, and he had made the front pages of the New York and Chicago papers frequently. No one knew where he "hid out," or even his name, for sure. Red Austin, "The Cat," from somewhere the name had come, and of late he had mentioned it himself.

According to Fred, he flourished at the start because the police left him alone. He preyed only on criminals, and was doing more to make rum running a hard business than all the enforcement agencies put together. But, as the murders piled up, the law started after him. He was a curious combination—that audacity mingled with humor, which distinguished him was not a logical characteristic in a man who was unquestionably as cold-blooded and deliberate a murderer as the rum coast had ever known.

Then he started more versatile operations. He still stole around twenty thousand dollars worth of liquor a week, at a minimum, but he branched out and polished off two banks to the tune of fifteen- and twenty-three-thousand dollars, respectively. The law was after him strong, the bootleggers had sworn to tear him limb from limb, and the general public looked on him as almost a legendary character—but where he hid, who he was, or who was in his gang remained a mystery.

Every scrap of that sneaking admiration which any man gives even to a criminal, if the criminal is an audacious master, vanished from my emotional equipment when I saw him assault Fred in that brutal, cold-blooded way. A week later I saw him work again under different circumstances, down at Fanny Shiller's famous houseboat joint.

Lured by my newspaper friend's statement that it was the hottest place this side of Mexico, I accompanied him one night.

I am perfectly aware of the fact that you will probably set me down as a rotten egg who ought to be behind the bars himself. I have frequently been so designated, in fact. But inasmuch as I'm not trying to put on any dog, I'll simply say that I went out of curiosity, being always ready to be an onlooker, at least, at any unusual sight or occasion.

I didn't drink, one of the reasons being that I had the semi-annual 609 flying examination due the next day, and it's —— to have a hangover when they spin you around and all that stuff. These flight surgeons can think of the funniest things!

Fanny was an old hag who was a famous underworld character—she'd been put out of Detroit after twenty years of flourishing business and had finally found a haven in the bootleggers' metropolis. This houseboat was fixed up like a café, with cribs for smoking opium on the top deck. It was moored out at a place called "Turkish Park," which consisted of a lot of small shacks set up on stilts to keep from floating away.

It was crowded—a load of girls, underworld characters and their women, and several of the élite of thuggery. Cy Sawtelle, who got a rakeoff on every bottle of beer delivered on this side from four Canadian breweries, was having a contest with a snappy little chap named Harrison, who practically had all of eastern Michigan, aside from Detroit, tied up on the rum business, to see which could spend the most money.

My friend told me Sawtelle had come in a straight eight sedan, driving it himself, and followed by a second straight eight, driven by his chauffer, in case anything went wrong with the first one. A coon orchestra that could tear any big-time vaudeville house wide open with their jazz stuff was playing, and every one was floating toward paralysis on a fast-flowing stream of liquor.

Without any warning whatever, five masked men, one very tall, catapulted in the door, their guns leveled on the room. Silence fell like a blanket. Then, through a window which opened on the outside deck of the houseboat, on the river side, came Cat Austin, masked as usual, but with no cap over his flaming red hair.

Whispers came from the crowd—and I'll be —— if they didn't admire; and in the case of some of those crazy hustlers, particularly the women, it amounted to adoration.

"Stick 'em up—everybody!" he said incisively.

His men disposed themselves about the walls.

"Everybody up—line up here!" he rasped, gesturing toward a side wall.

"Blinky" Wilson, a bit drunk and anxious to show off before the painted, blowsy blonde he was with, really was a gunman of parts. But his daring hand never reached his gun. Austin dropped him.

"Line up—quick!" he snarled, and they did so. Me among 'em, of course.

There was big money in that crowd. The haul was an easy seven thousand. The noise of a motor boat was audible outside as they went through the mob. Sawtelle disgorged at least twelve hundred, I think, and Harrison nearly as much. Sawtelle finally spoke to Austin, who was standing well back, watching, while his men did the work.

"I'll give you —— near as much as you're making now—and it'll be safer, Cat," he stated.

"I suppose I'd live to collect the first week's jack!" sneered Austin. "Any one o' yuh would send your best friend tuh jail for a fifty dollar reward!"

That ended that. I got the impression that Austin was thoroughly enjoying himself. It seemed to me he was preening himself a bit. But there was no questioning his coolness or decisiveness. Poor Blinky Wilson lay in a pool of blood on the floor. He was dead. Every one could see where the hole was.

The gang backed to the three windows opening toward the river, and all of them left except Austin. Before he dived through—we could hear that Liberty speeding up—his thin, wide mouth widened in an urbane smile.

"Fanny'll set up the drinks from now on, maybe," he remarked, which was a laugh in itself, and out he went. The motor boat roared away over the river.

And that was that.

IV

WELL, Red Austin simply disappeared, and his gang with him. Unlike other well-known hijackers, the Cat seemed to have no friends. There were no subterranean rumors as to where he went, or why; whether the police were too close on his trail, or whether he had been killed, or other possible explanations.

According to my trusty informant, Liebjeck, there was a vague yarn anent Austin having crowned his career by double-crossing his gang out of their share of the last haul, but there was no evidence to back it up. No one knew who was in the group, or where they went. The Austin gang simply quit.

And there was a reward of $2,000 for him, dead or alive. It was pretty well understood that the rum-runners themselves were willing to make a present of $5,000 to the man who could or would knock him off.

You can possibly imagine how many hardy hunters there were creeping through the bushes along the Detroit River ready to strike a blow for the glory of their pocketbooks by sniping Cat Austin.

My court-martial was the result of that night at Fanny's likewise. The law is pretty well fixed in that country, but occasionally they make a public play, and Fanny is often the goat. They raided the boat about five minutes after Austin had left.

Inasmuch as the cream of society was not present, I was picked as the horrible example. "Including Army Officer" was in practically every headline, and there were enough headlines, laid end to end, to reach from New York to Ypsilanti, Michigan.

Before two days had passed the papers had me mixed in everything from a booze-ring to rum-running by airplane, and I understand that there was a rumor that I was connected with the Teapot Dome affair. Well, having got this off my chest, let's return, by boat and by train, to Milwaukee, where I left myself with my bleary eyes glued to the telegram announcing the imminence of my trial for being more of a bum than any army officer should be.

"This means I've got to mount my high bicycle and start east," I reflected, and leaned out the window to have a look at the weather. I wanted to fly back if I could, naturally, instead of leaving my ship in Milwaukee.

The sky was dark and lowering, but there was neither rain nor snow descending therefrom. I called up my obese used-to-be, said good-by, ate a large and hearty "brunch"—combination breakfast and lunch—and at three thirty I was tooling the big ton-and-half bomber out across Lake Michigan on my three hundred mile trip to Selden. The field is thirty miles north of Detroit.

Lake Michigan is eighty miles or so wide at that point, and it was a mass of tumbled, piled-up ice. Ordinarily I'd have taken the long way around, and been over land all the time, but there was only a short interval, comparatively, before darkness and I was in a hurry.

I'd gotten about twenty-five miles out, I guess, when the storm hit me. My twelve cylinder, four hundred horsepower Liberty was clicking off the beats as regular as clockwork, but nevertheless I wasn't comfortable. When a miss in the motor means a nice cold drowning party down in the midst of one of the Great Lakes in January I'm not what you might call peaceful and care free. Then the storm—a high wind, and sleet and snow.

I couldn't see ten feet ahead of me. In five minutes my plane was covered with ice, and I'll give you my word that I've never been so cold in my life. I couldn't see the ground, or rather, the ice, at all, and when I lifted my head to try to look ahead the sleet and snow cut my face to pieces. Even raindrops feel like so many needles, because of a plane's speed, so you can figure what sleet will do.

The wind was terrific, a howling gale that made the ship all but uncontrollable. The compass was of but little service—the plane would not keep a course steady enough to settle it despite all my efforts. The Great Lakes sailors can tell you what a real storm means up there—just picture me, blind, frozen, hopeless, five thousand feet in the air, trying to fight it.

I've had bad moments in my life, but never anything to compare with that battle. I knew I was out over the lake, yet I didn't know where. If I'd been over land I couldn't have seen enough to make a safe landing. The ship creaked and strained, blown around like a helpless leaf, and often the roar of that tremendous motor was absolutely inaudible.

I'm ashamed to admit it, but toward the end I didn't care. I was exhausted, almost frozen to death, my face a raw mass of flesh, and my gas about gone. I was afraid I might live. For a while I thought that the storm was lessening in its fury, but I was fooled.

When the wind rose again after its brief lull, and the sleet and snow drove against me triumphantly in long, slanting lines of torture, I looked around at my ice-covered ship, and down at my ice-covered self, and thought of how pleasant it would be to curl up down in the snow somewhere and just go off to sleep. I was that far gone—a white wraith a mile high, unseen by any human being, fighting the world.

My mind was made up. Probably I was over land by now, although there was no telling where that daddy of all the winds had blown me. In any event, I had only fifteen minutes' gas left in my main tank, and the reserve tank was good for only thirty more. The storm showed no signs of letting up. Might as well make the plunge right then as any time.

So I nosed the D. H. down, and with that marvelous Liberty still drumming off its rhythmic song in a lower key—I throttled it—we shot downward through the storm. My altimeter was my only guide. I couldn't keep the ship in a normal glide—and no ground to go by. All I could do was watch the airspeed motor and listen for the scream of the wires which I couldn't hear for the fury of the wind.

At a thousand feet the ground was still invisible. Flying with every bit of skill and experience that there was in me, I tried to drop downward slowly. Can you imagine with what feelings I waited for my first look at the ground?

Well, I got it late. And it wasn't ground. It was water and ice. I could see so poorly through the storm and my iced goggles that I was barely able to pull up the De Haviland in time to avoid smashing right into it. For a second I got a wild thrill—you know how it is when you pluck a whisker out of St. Peter's beard, so to speak—and then, for a moment I was through. Hopeless, utterly washed up with life in general, flying in particular, and myself. I was still over the lake, with no idea where I had been blown to, and no idea where land lay.

Then I changed again. I was sore. I was so mad I could have bitten a chunk out of the cowling, and masticated a few rocker-arms off the motor. I sent that D. H., motor wide open, speeding long about ten feet off the tumbled ice and water. I could see a few hundred feet ahead by keeping my head up and standing the flaying the storm gave me, and I took a perverse satisfaction is sticking my face right into it as though daring it to do its worst. I flew due east by the compass, but the wind was sending me half-sideward. The ship was pointing southeast and really moving directly east.

The surface of the lake was a horrible thing to look at. Here some open water, there a mound of ice; in one place a stretch of ice like glass, and at another place snow and ice combined in a queer mess.

Figuring that I was over the lake and that there would be no obstacles to hurdle, I just let the D. H. have her head and make time. Consequently, I nearly killed myself again by butting head-on into something that loomed blackly through the snow. My goggles were in terrible shape—all I saw was something black that was rushing at me around two miles a minute. I zoomed just in time, crossed it, barely got over the trees at its crest, and then gave vent to eighteen or twenty loud huzzas. I was over land!

Back of a small forest of trees there was an open stretch, several hundred yards square. I dipped down over it, and it looked to my delighted eyes as if the sleet had frozen and made a hard surface on top of the snow. In any event I was coming down, pronto. I'd have landed in the middle of a meeting of the K. K. K. even if I'd been a darky named Levy with the insignia of the knights of Columbus painted on my ship. Anything to get down. The same snow conditions would obtain anywhere, and I wasn't going to prowl around through that storm any longer.

The wind seemed to be from the south, unless my compass lied. That meant I had been blown in a northerly direction over the lake. Of course there was no telling where I had guided the ship in that storm. I circled above the trees on the landward side of the clearing and pointed into the wind. It was so strong it was nearly enough to support the ship motionless in the air, with the motor turning thirteen hundred. My land speed as I dived was only about thirty miles an hour.

When I shut off the motor after leveling off, the ship stopped as if I'd jammed on four wheel brakes. I pulled up the nose, stalled her, and squatted to earth. I expected to squash down through the snow—I'd cut the switches to save the propeller. I didn't—at first. I rolled a few feet, and then one side went down like a shot. There was about three inches of snow, but below that there was a crust as tough as a bride's first pie covering.

I hopped out for a look. The right wheel was broken, caught in a weak place in the crust. I was stranded.

I had seen no sign of a habitation; it was close to zero; I was about frozen; I didn't know where I was and I didn't give a hoot. I was on the ground. Circumstances alter cases. The next time you're sick figure how much worse it would be if you had lockjaw besides.

V

WELL, I shut off the motor and for a full half hour I pranced and gamboled all by myself to break the ice jam in my circulation. That must have been a prodigious spectacle—me doing a sort of classical dance all around a deserted strip of snow, surrounded by barren, wind-blown trees.

I was dressed in a leather coat, with fur-lined flying coveralls over it, so it didn't take long to get warmed up. Then I set fire to a cigaret which did me good, and set sail to find some company, food, and other matters. I felt real sociable. I hadn't an idea how long it would take, of course. I just started to leave the lake behind, and trust to luck.

That hard undersurface made it comparatively easy walking. The snow was so deep my head was practically on a level with the tops of some of the trees. That meant something to even my ossified intellect. I came to the conclusion that I must have been blown clear up to the Northern Penninsula—that snow was eight or ten feet deep.

That was far from an encouraging thought, I'll say. Do you happen to know the northern penninsula of the sovereign state of Michigan? Well, it's got about one inhabitant per hundred square miles. I don't know how far it is from the North Pole, but I know the Pole can't be any colder.

The inhabitants are all Finns and Poles and Norwegians, who are hardier than Esquimaux. When they look out of the window in that country and see eight feet of snow they figure there's been a little frost, and when they have to go up the chimney to get out of their houses there's been a flurry of snow. If it ever gets above zero they carry fans, and the children are born with snowshoes on their feet.

Seriously speaking, if I was up there, it might well be several hundred miles to the nearest house. And I had neither food, nor a gun to shoot any, nor anything else but a feeling of satisfaction that my feet were on the ground instead of frozen to a rudder.

I walked half an hour, and it was getting dark. The wind died down, and the storm turned into softly falling snowflakes. And then I saw a light through the trees, shining like a tiny firefly.

Dull care flew away from me then, and I cantered along toward it with a great deal of gusto. I craved society, and food, and a warm stove. Likewise an idea of where I was.

To get to the house, after I emerged from the thin forest growth, I had to cross a large open space. Probably fields, in the summer time, I reflected. The cabin was built of logs, and was quite large. Only one story.

The moon was already up, and the sheen of it on the snow, and this black house with the white roof and the light shining, made one think of a Christmas post card. The snow had been shoveled out from around the house, although there was a foot or more of it which had fallen that afternoon covering the ground around the door. I slid down into the shoveled space, and walked toward the door. The window I had seen was in the side of the house, and I passed another, in the front, on the way to the door. I didn't look in, but went right to the door and knocked.

Voices inside had hushed when I passed the window. For a moment there was utter silence. Somehow it sent the creeps through me—it seemed unnatural.

There was a curious rasping sound from above. I glanced up just in time to see a big bunch of icy snow sliding off the roof. I jumped to one side just in time to escape it. Which saved my life.

The next second the door flew open, and there came the crack of a pistol shot. It followed so quickly on the opening of the door that I knew the gunman must have shot without waiting to look.

I waited not on the order of my going. I dashed around the corner of the house like a kangaroo. Then I peeked around the corner with my good eye.

A bullet tore splinters loose within an inch of my helmeted head. But in that instant my eye had photographed a mental picture, as it were. It was that of a tall, wide-shouldered young chap, with dark hair and as handsome a face as I have ever seen. He was in flannel shirt, nondescript trousers, and the felt linings of those big rubber things they wear in the snow country. He was stealing toward me, a Colt in his hand, along the side of the house, and if ever I saw murder in a man's eyes it was in his.

I hopped around to the back of the house, and could hear his footsteps thudding after me. Now that I think back on it, it was a funny sight—me galloping around that shack like a startled giraffe, and that fellow with a gun after me. I stopped at the far side, and took another peek. He was coming all right, and the gun in his hand spat fire. The bullet sung past me as I ducked back.

There was a window close to me, and I got a fleeting impression of an old man's gaunt, lined face and unutterably tragic eyes looking out at me.

I got out of range of the window. As I've told you, I'm six feet four, and the roof was low. I know I couldn't last but a minute or two more, so I took a desperate chance. With one leap I was up between projecting rafters, and then drew myself to the roof. I had made but little noise. My pursuer had been approaching stealthily, having slowed from his run as though expecting a surprize, so I had time. I waited tensely, peering over the roof.

I heard a high-pitched cry of warning from within—it was a very musical woman's voice—but it came too late. I saw my man peer around the corner, gun ready. Headfirst, I leaped on him.

I was lucky. I'd fooled him, and I got him just as his gun was coming up. We lit in a heap, with me on top. He fought like a wildcat, for a moment, but somehow there didn't seem to be a great deal of strength in that magnificent body of his. Nevertheless, he twisted and strained with all he had, and tried his mightiest to get his gun loose from my grip. Finally I had him helpless.

"Now, mister, just what have you got in mind?" I inquired of him politely.

He looked at me for the first time, and his dark, strangely opaque eyes widened. Suddenly a set of perfect teeth flashed in a smile.

"Who in —— are you?" he gasped, all out of breath. "I thought you were—don't shoot, Ethel! It's not Frazier!"

I looked around, from my prone position, and it was my turn to gape. A girl was standing there, and in her hands was a rifle. She held it gingerly, as though totally unaccustomed to it. But that wasn't the main part of the picture. The principal thing in my mind was that she was the most luscious, eye-filling, soul-satisfying sight my critical peepers had ever come to rest upon.

She was blonde—and what a blonde! Her hair, in the wan moonlight, seemed alive. She was so close to me I could see the wild glow in her eyes, and the flaming red in her cheeks. She was tall, and seemed to be the incarnation of what the writers must mean by "supple." She was like a pantheress as she stood there, crouching a bit, her flaming eyes questioning as if not quite satisfied.

For a moment I was knocked for a row of Mongolian meat pies. Then I came to myself. There was monkey business I wanted to straighten out. It didn't strike me that the girl know much about guns, so I dared to do something even with her standing over me. I wrenched my captive's Colt from his hand in two seconds less than nothing, and the next second had knocked that rifle from the girl's hand.

As I leaped to my feet the man's clutching hands nearly tripped me. For a moment his handsome face froze, as though he was steeling himself for any ordeal. The girl looked as though she was ready to spring at me, and could cheerfully tear me limb from limb. However, with the Colt cocked and one eye on the house, I spoke as follows, i. e., viz., and to wit:

"I don't know what the habits of hospitality are in this neck of the woods, but you'll pardon me if I feel more comfortable talking with this gun in my hand. Now, what's the racket?"

"Can I get up?" asked the man, with that likeable smile, and I nodded.

His nose was aquiline, and beneath it his well-cut mouth was wide and thin. A square jaw was thrust forward aggressively. As I said, he was a boldly handsome type, and there was something unusual in his eyes and flat-cheeked face.

"I owe you an apology," he said, his words as precise as an Englishman's.

He spoke with just the trace of an accent, and slowly, as though trying to be correct. There was something vaguely familiar about him, as if I had seen some one who resembled him slightly. For the life of me I could not run the feeling down, however. He smoothed his jet black hair with one white hand, and went on:

"You have nothing to fear, sir. Let's go inside, and I'll explain everything. How did you get here?"

"Airplane," I answered briefly.

I followed the good-looking pair into a big, low ceilinged room which apparently did duty as kitchen, dining-room and sitting-room. A great stove made it very warm, and it was far from unattractive. Shining pots and pans, red-and-white table cloth, and homely, old-fashioned chairs made it a cozy looking place, shabbily comfortable. A big kerosene lamp with a white shade was its only illumination.

In one of the chairs was an old lady, crying. The old man emerged from the shadows into the light. His eyes were sunken, and his lined face thin and pallid. A scraggly gray mustache drooped over his mouth.

The old lady looked at me silently. Her face, too, was sunken and lined, and there was utter anguish depicted on it. I held the Colt in my hand, for I was not yet satisfied, and her eyes clung to it as if fascinated with terror.

The young fellow began talking rapidly, in a foreign language which I soon identified as Polish. There seemed to be some measure of relief in the faces of the two old people, although beneath the surface there lurked tragedy, or my eyes deceived me. The girl, like some magnificent Diana, stood taut against the wall, and then dropped into a chair. She sighed wearily.

Finally the young fellow gestured toward me.

"This is my father and mother, sir," he said simply. "Our name is Greweski. This is Ethel Aldi, my cousin. I assure you that you have nothing to fear. Have a chair."

While I was seating myself, he talked rapidly to the girl, in a low whisper. He excused himself to me with a wide smile.

"I wanted to reassure her," he said. "Would you mind telling us where you came from, and how you happened to come here?"

I told them briefly. They hung on my words, and once or twice meaning looks passed between them.

"Now where am I, and why did you figure me as a rabbit or something to take a pot at?" I asked in conclusion.

"You're on Beaver Island—eighty miles from the mainland," was the staggering reply.

"What's the mainland?" I managed to ask.

I couldn't have been more surprized if he'd told me I had butted into a game of Mah Jong on Mars.

"The Northern Penninsula," he replied, eyeing me narrowly.

He was a curious contrast—boyish one minute, and yet there were times, like this, when a world of sophistication seemed to show in his eyes, and there was something hard as a diamond just beneath the surface.

"I was certainly blown about," I said at length. "Eighty miles of ice and water and general slop between me and the mainland, eh? Pardon me for a moment if I seem to be absent-minded."

God knows it was enough to make even me indulge in a few cerebrations, as it were. Here I was on an island with a broken wheel on my ship, and no possible way to get to land. No communication, by ordinary means, would be possible until the ice broke up. And I was supposed to be at Selden Field to stand a court martial the next morning. Furthermore, when I did not arrive at Selden and could not be found, I'd be considered dead, of course.

That didn't mean so much—I haven't any folks since an uncle of mine who was a senator kicked the bucket. The only mourner would be Loot. Jim Tuttle. I owed him fifty bucks which he'd figure he'd said good-by to.

The situation, though, added to the peculiarity of the bunch I found myself mingling with, was enough to give me a slight kick, at that. And, being human, the thought of the girl was enough to help me be a philosopher. In fiction there's always a beautiful girl looming over the horizon, but this was the first time it had happened to me. And I've been stranded in divers places.

Finally, aware of the curious looks which all four of them were bending on me, I asked:

"Have you any gasoline on the island? Are there other people?"

"No other people, but we have gasoline for the motor boat," he answered slowly. "Why?"

"I was about out of gas, that's all. However, I've got a broken wheel so I don't see how gas will do me any good at that. I don't suppose you have any spare airplane wheels about the place."

"You wrecked?"

The question was so eager, and the sudden glow in his eyes was so obvious, that I was astounded. It was as if he was tickled to death at the news. The old couple, however, acted differently. There was a sort of mingled delight and disappointment in their faces.

They puzzled me. They were as harmless looking a pair as I've ever seen. Mrs. Greweski was stout, placid, motherly looking, and in her husband's face there was a sort of patient stoicism. Both of them, however, were thin-faced and pallid, with shadows in their eyes. I wondered how it must have seemed to them to see a stranger chased around with a gun—and what subterranean currents there were to account for what had happened in the last few minutes.

"Your passenger was killed?" asked young Greweski, and the question was like the crack of a whip. It seemed that he had shot it at me to take me by surprize. There was a rasp in his voice which reminded me of something.

"I told you I was alone!" I told him in a somewhat peeved and waspish manner. I was getting fed up with mystery. "Now, friends and fellow citizens, before I loosen my firm grasp on this cannon here, I want you to tell me why I'm so welcome here that a salvo had to be fired in my honor—and in my direction. And listen, Greweski Junior. You tried to kill me, remember. Make your story straight, and it'd better be good!"

I got a little tough because all of a sudden the whole thing was on my nerves. The strain of the day, I presume.

There was a moment of silence. Young Greweski eyed me steadily. The old folks rather drew into themselves, as though frightened. They seemed to have been beaten by life. The girl was leaning forward in her chair, her glorious eyes staring fixedly at me. I glanced at her, and as I did her mouth curved in just the hint of a slow smile. I felt as though I'd just imbibed a healthy snort of bourbon.

However, I had more important business right then, and my eyes shifted to Greweski.

"Better talk," I advised him.

"It's like this, lieutenant," he said, and that boyish smile broke over his face. "I'm in some trouble—that's the reason I'm here. You must admit that it's rather startling, on an uninhabited island, with the lake absolutely impassable for boats, to see a man pass the window and knock on the door. And you resemble a man from Cleveland that's after me—and threatened to get me if he had to come by airplane! You're not him, of course. But I thought you were. And if you had been, you'd be dead this minute!"

This was honest confession with a vengeance.

"Just what's the lay?" I inquired. "I believe I have a right to know."

There was something breathlessly taut in the air, as if much depended on what Greweski said. The frankness with which he had spoken, and the wide smile which had warmed his face, gave me a sudden liking for him.

"If I tell you, truthfully, why I did as I did, can I count on your discretion? You'll not go back and tell too much?"

"Depends on what you did," I answered him, and for a second I was glad that I held a gun.

His face softened again, and he laughed. He was an ingratiating ——.

"That's enough," he said. "Bluntly, I'm a fugitive from justice. I've been away from home for nearly twenty years."

"What?"

My surprized query made him smile. He did not look a day over thirty to me.

"I ran away from this very island when I was sixteen—I'm thirty-six now," he told me. "To make a long story short, ever since prohibition I've been getting deeper and deeper into bootlegging. Previous to that I knocked around in a lot of places, mainly as a cheap ham actor, but I was never afoul of the law, you understand.

"Well, it looked like easy money—this bootlegging, and I was practically broke in Cleveland. So I dabbled in it in a small way—didn't seem like a crime, some way. I got deeper and deeper, and mixed up with the ring which runs the bootlegging of Cleveland from top to bottom. It includes officials, wealthy men, the underworld—all kinds. And I was making money, and going higher up all the time.

"Then there came a deal, months ago, that I couldn't stand. Conscience been hurting me, anyway, I guess. Anyway, they bumped off six men, one right after the other. The ring did, I mean, because they were afraid of 'em. There'd been killing and hijacking and all before, but this sickened me. I decided to quit. And what I don't know about 'em just can't be known that's all. I know their racket from A to Z.

"Just as I was preparing to quit there came a deal where the higher-ups framed a friend of mine as the murderer of an honest Federal agent. Well, I came through to save him, and gave the bulls a tip so they got the right man—a higher-up named Farley.

"That ruined me. I got out of town before they could bump me off, but I heard indirectly that they'd framed me plenty. I'm supposed to stand trial for everything from murder on, down there—and I know that that bunch can frame anything. I wouldn't have a chance, although I'm innocent of everything but aiding the whisky business.

"I'd be tried before one of their judges—and I know —— well that they'd have their tracks covered enough so that if I turned State's evidence it wouldn't be worth anything. Trust them for that. If they haven't, I'd never live an hour after the dicks got me to the mainland. That crew'll do anything.

"As for your case, it's simple. I blew in here to hide out last fall. You remember the wreck of the 'Flying Spray?' Well, you wouldn't, anyway. It was wrecked about fifty miles out, and a bird named Frazier, one of the ring and a tough, double-crossing, murdering hound, was on it. How he got a boat to himself I don't know, but he showed up on this island all alone in a boat.

"And he saw me, and knew me. He's tall, like you, and claims he once was a flyer. I don't know; he's a terrible liar, and that may be bull. Anyway, he got the drop on me. He didn't kill me—he hasn't got guts enough for that under those circumstances—but he did get away and claimed he'd collect the thousand dollars reward the gang offered for me, dead or alive.

"Pa and Ma and Ethel remember him well. He swiped half our food, insulted Ethel, and so forth. Then he put out in his boat, with a sail on it, to make the mainland.

"Naturally, I was going to blow. But I got sick, and there was no special hurry. Then we found that this thug had nearly ruined our motor boat—so I couldn't get away. By the time we had that fixed, a terrible job, there came the big freeze, and I was marooned here—no way to reach shore.

"The only comfort is that they can't get to me either—except by airplane. And it would be like that gang to see that that was done. Egg on the dicks to fly over here in a hired plane. Or I wouldn't put it past 'em to come over themselves and bump me off. Frazier didn't have nerve enough to shoot in cold blood.

"We saw your helmet at the window. We figured it was him and some one else. And I tried to get you. And you'll pardon me for saying, Lieutenant," he went on, changing from the slang he had been using to his meticulous English, "That I'm not satisfied yet, completely, whether you're here after me or not!"

"Well, between your story and mine, maybe neither one of us believes it all," I told him. "However, here we are, marooned. My yarn is the straight goods, Greweski. And I don't give a hang about you—it's none of my business. Looks like we'd have to live together this winter, so let's forget it all a while——"

The elder Greweski cleared his throat, and spoke for the first time. And gentlemen, when he articulated he pronounced a mouthful of syllables.

"We got no food—we starve, now!"

VI

THAT bald statement, made in guttural, broken English, brought me up standing. Its effect was heightened by the fact that I was hungry. I could have browsed in a good pasture like a cow. I've been in various situations, but never in one where I couldn't see a bite of something in the immediate offing.

It needed no elaboration, either. I comprehended the thing in a flash. The boat out of commission, the sudden closing of navigation, failure to get to mainland in time to lay in the winter stock—all that. And young Greweski's explanation bore me out. Even in that moment of stunned surprize, my brain, curiously enough, was mulling one peculiar thing over.

Why had the young outlaw showed, for a moment, nothing but delight when he heard that I could not get to land? Did he prefer to starve to death rather than take any chances of being caught? His father and mother, and the girl, had been relieved, undoubtedly—but as I mentioned at the time, as soon as the first reaction was over there had been unmistakable, hopeless disappointment in their faces.

Now that I knew the reason, the pinched look in their faces seemed more terrible. A close scrutiny of the girl showed that she was standing it better, naturally, than the older people, but her face was as white as a sheet save for very red lips and a spot of high color on each cheek—possibly from fever.

I got out of my chair, and walked the floor in my usual long striding, loose-jointed way. If you just saw the upper part of my body, you'd swear I was walking on stilts. I am not graceful as the gazelle, by any means.

"You have no food whatever?" I asked the old man.

The girl answered for him. She had been silent as the grave, and it seemed that her eyes had never left me.

"We've been living on apples and carrots for a week," she said, and her voice was a low contralto which struck me as being about as good an organ of speech as I have ever listened to. "And they are about gone. One apple a day, and half a carrot——"

Suddenly she broke down and cried. It was weakness, I suppose. Greweski came over and patted her back to comfort her.

I think it was her weeping which brought me out of the stupor I was in. You'll no doubt think me a ninny for falling so hard, but it comes to all men, brethren, and I've been exposed as often as the average. I arise to announce that at that moment there was nothing too desperate for me to attempt, and right on the heels of this laudable, courageous, adolescent ecstasy, which filled my benighted brain, there came a thought.

"Do any of you know whether there is any stretch of comparatively smooth ice around the island—with no open water or anything as a barrier from the land?"

The old man caressed his mustache, and nodded, his small, dull eyes suddenly brightening.

"Yeah—out here!" he said, gesturing vaguely.

In stumbling words he explained that it was a thousand yards long, and had been smooth unless the snow——

"We can shovel it off," I told them. "Cheer up, folks. I'll put home-made skids on the plane tomorrow, we'll transport her over there, if we have to cut down half the trees to get her through, and I'll go after food for you!"

Right then the fact that I'd surely have to crack up in land—and cracking a De Haviland is no parlor sport—meant nothing. I was sorry for them, sorry for myself, and a woman's tears will turn a man into a —— fool anytime.

Not that the idea was so foolish, when the alternative was starvation—but the holy, uplifted state in which I found myself beneath the gaze of Ethel Aldi was about as completely foolish as I've ever experienced.

The sudden hope in their faces was pathetic. Once again, however, Greweski junior was different. For a second he seemed to freeze in his tracks, and that little film stole over his eyes, and made them muddy and expressionless. His hand rested on Ethel's back, and the arm was rigid. Then he smiled, and joined in the sudden babble of questions and excited comments which filled the room.

As he gestured the sleeve of his flannel shirt fell back. The button on the cuff had come loose. My casual glance fell on his arm, became much less casual, halted there a minute, and then lifted to his face. He had not noticed what had happened. He was automatically buttoning his sleeve as he whispered something to Ethel. The old folks were talking rapidly, and the old lady was laying down the law about something.

Young Greweski's arm was covered with tiny needlemarks that were unmistakable. He was a junker—a hop head—a dope fiend.

VII

PERHAPS I should have been less surprized than I was. I know how prevalent the gentle habit of inhaling, imbibing, or injecting poppy juice or poppy powder is, particularly among those denizens of the half-world with whom he admittedly had associated. And yet, somehow, looking at him, and finding him up there on that deserted island, brought me up short. And I began to figure that maybe he hadn't told me everything.

So utterly dumb is the mind of man, or at least my mind, that this discovery was almost immediately thrust into the background because of a woman. Watching their earnest conversation, my eyes were on that bewildering blonde damsel, Ethel.

I am not an expert on women, unless realizing the fact is in itself a beginning toward understanding them, but I conceived the idea that in her face and her eyes as they rested on him I saw love amounting to adoration. Now laugh—but I felt disappointed. I won't say I was quite such a —— fool that I had already kidded myself into thinking I was in love, but I'll tell you frankly that she was working on my mind.

In a moment the old lady overwhelmed me with eager questions about whether I was sure I could get away and get some food for them. My answer was that if there really was a long stretch of smooth ice, I felt I could do it.

"To make sure, I'll walk over where you say it is, and look for myself," I promised. "And then you'll know definitely."

Gambling on this promise, the old lady cooked up a little cornmeal and I was allowed three apples. Before I had started to imbibe young Greweski got up.

"I've been laying around in the house all day," he stated. "I think I'll go for a little walk in the open air. Want to come, Ethel?"

"No—I'm too weak," she answered simply, and I could well believe her. Perhaps it was the wanness of her face, due to insufficient food, but when one saw her close by there was a certain delicacy and fragility about her countenance, a semi-spiritual quality, if you will; that was far different from one's first impression of vibrant strength and radiant health.

It was amazing how well Greweski stood the starvation rations. He showed no ill effects at all. As he went out, throwing us a parting smile, I remember wondering how much dope he had brought with him. Those junkers go crazy when they're deprived of it, you know. Perhaps being cooped up on the island would have consequences the old folks didn't figure, unless he had carried a huge supply with him.

The old lady was over by the stove, and her husband seemed to be in a sort of a stupor, his frail old body hunched down in its chair, close to the fire. No sooner had the boy gone out than Ethel came over to a chair close beside my own. She gave me both batteries from her eyes, and there was something deep within them that I could not fathom.

"You're not fooling us about being able to leave?" she asked me softly.

I shook my head.

"It can be done on skids, I think," I answered.

She looked around at the old folks, and then whispered tensely:

"Will you take me with you?"

I could only gape like a hooked fish. I presume my eyes popped out so far she could have knocked them off with a stick. I couldn't have been more surprized if the Statue of Liberty had ridden into the room on a velocipede.

"Huh?" I gasped finally, with great intelligence.

"Take me away with you!" she repeated, her eyes glowing warmly a foot from my face. "I don't care where——"

"But why?" I asked dazedly. She had me in a tailspin, I'm telling you right.

"Because I'll go crazy—or kill myself—if I have to stay here!" she said calmly, and there was something impressive, entirely untheatrical, about the way she said it.

For once in my life I ran out of words. The dictionary was an unplumbed mine of the parts of speech as far as I was concerned. Under her steady gaze I was sort of hypnotized I presume. Finally I snapped into some semblance of myself, and the old bean commenced to warm up a little and stew up some semi-sane adverbs and adjectives.

"Will you tell me why you feel this way?" I asked her.

"I've been here over a year now, because I had nowhere else to go, nothing to do. I was glad to be here, for a while, because—but never mind that. My uncle and aunt are wonderful, but Stanley—how I hate that man!"

There was a tigerish viciousness in those last words that lashed and stung, I'll tell the world. And once again I was battling feebly for control. What a fine observer of women I was—thinking she was in love with him.

"But where would I take you? Have you anywhere to go?"

"I don't care! I can get a job somewhere, maybe—a factory or something. I'll live anywhere, do anything, rather than stay here, I tell you!"

Although she was talking in low tones, that vibrant contralto was mighty sweet music to my rude western ears.

"Listen," she continued, and her voice dropped to almost a whisper. The old lady was setting the table. "I don't know who you are, or anything about you, of course. I don't care whether you're here to get Stanley or not—I hope you are! But I will trust you. It almost seems as if my prayers had been answered—that you'd come here to help me.

"Why don't you take Stanley away in your plane? And deliver him to the authorities in Cleveland? Then I could stay here this winter, if necessary—but, oh, how I hope when you come back with the food that you'll take me with you!"

"Why do you hate him so much?" I asked.

"He's just a—a snake! He winds my uncle and aunt around his little finger. It sounds funny, maybe—but I carry a gun to bed with me every night, Mr. Evans and—and——"

"I see. So you think I'm a detective, or an emissary from that gang in Cleveland, here to get him, do you?"

"Aren't you?"

Her wide eyes were boring into mine, and she waited with very red lips parted a trifle for my answer. I shook my head, and then said—just to try her out, as it were—

"What would you say if I was?"

"I'd be glad! It would nearly kill my uncle and aunt, at first, but in the end they'd be happier. They've lived here for thirty years, and they're out of touch with the world, but he's caused them a good deal of unhappiness already. And I believe he did something worse than he admits, Mr. Evans! Please confide in me—I'll help you! I'd do anything to get him away from here—or leave myself! Didn't you come here after him?"

The old lady was calling me to the table.

"Why did you come after me with a gun, if you wanted to see him captured?"

"I thought it was that other fellow that was here before. He was worse than Stanley, if that's possible! But as soon as I saw you I knew differently. And you'll never believe how happy I was! Out here, starving to death and with that unspeakable Stanley always under foot and my aunt and uncle almost crazy with worry and grief —you came like a message from heaven, Mr. Evans.

"Won't you either take Stanley with you—or me? Take him and get rid of him to the authorities, and then I'll stay with aunt and uncle until I can persuade them to move."

"We'll think things over a bit," I told her. "I'm going to take a peek at the ice myself this very night, and see what's what."

I ate cornmeal without milk or sugar—just some salt, and three apples. I was steaming in a fog, all right. I was slightly on a bias. It was partly these quick revelations, and a natural feeling that I was in somewhat of a nightmare. According to the girl, Stanley Greweski was a more or less common specimen of the genus thug—cold-blooded, degenerate. I knew he was a dope fiend.

He appeared like a good fellow—a man gone mildly astray by his own admission. His father and mother were fine old people, keeping their hands off things for love of their only son.

And then, of course, the girl was sort of working in my blood. I'm not trying to give myself any of the best of it, as you see—just telling the truth—and you'll have a right to think that I'm a sap where a good-looking young female is concerned. As a matter of fact, I'm not.

That conversation sounds theatrical and all that to you, doesn't it? Well, the thing was as natural as breathing when it happened—and I've always been in the habit of wondering what a woman was after if she showed any interest in me. But I was crazy about her appearance and voice, and I liked the girl. And I was in no mental mood to refuse her anything which seemed important to her welfare.

I had dropped into a queerly scrambled mess. And as I wolfed that food I was scared to death. Not that I'd have trouble with the Greweskis, but because I felt a premonition that I was falling in love. I'll go the limit, and tell the whole truth.

I, big, clumsy boll-buster as I was, sat there at the table like an adolescent idiot and dreamed great dreams of lassoing the villain, saving the girl, helping her out; it was just an act of grace that I didn't go the rest of the way and picture some ——cottage somewhere, besides.

VIII

I ANNOUNCED my intention of looking over the ice immediately, got directions, and set out. As I went out the door Ethel's eyes were on me, and she smiled. It was pretty cold out, but I was warm enough.

I saw Stanley Greweski's tracks in the snow drifts, leading toward the ship. It struck me that it would be a good thing to look the crate over and make sure she didn't need tying down to keep from blowing away. I figured the wheel sunk in the snow would hold it, but it looked as if the D. H. and its Liberty were the only things that could save our lives. Too much care would not be enough, so to speak.

The snow had stopped, and there was only a light wind. The snow had drifted badly —there were long stretches where the icy crust below was swept bare, and then there would be heavy drifts. I picked up Greweski's footsteps often.

The moon was high in the sky, and there were a million stars out. The storm was completely over. By the light of the said moon I examined the crate, and decided that there was no possibility of its being blown about. I strapped the stick back to keep the controls from flapping in an abandoned manner, and then started toward the northern edge of the island, where the smooth ice was supposed to be.

Immediately I saw some tracks. They lead not toward the house, but diagonally southeastward. There were just a few, in the drifted snow around the ship.

I believe I would have followed them, just out of curiosity and to find out what Greweski was up to, regardless of the girl. He was an admitted criminal, a dope fiend, and he had tried to kill me. I was far from believing myself thoroughly at home and sacred against any machinations that might come forth from Greweski's brain.

But, in any event, all that the girl had said made it more imperative that I peer about here and there and see what I could see. So I plunged into the woods, following the line of his steps, which I picked up now and then in the snowdrifts.

In ten minutes I came to a tumble-down cabin—just a sort of shed. The roof had fallen in on one side, and it was almost a total wreck. The rear wall, and one side wall, was still standing. I proceeded cautiously, because I didn't want Greweski to shoot carelessly, although I was pretty certain he had carried no gun. I myself, I may state, still had that gat stuck in the pocket of my leather coat.

As I stole closer through the trees, I saw tracks leading away from the cabin as well as into it. This made me bolder, and I stepped forth in a high, wide and handsome manner. I wondered what Stanley was doing, prowling around through the woods at that hour.

It was a bit creepy, at that, as I remembered that I was eighty miles out in the lake, and all the other circumstances. Entering a deserted house under the conditions made an excellent start for a good ghost story.

I was very curious regarding Greweski's reasons for visiting that shack. Naturally, the idea I had in mind was that he had cached his supply of drugs there.

Consequently, when I succeeded in crawling into the little coop formed by the two walls and the broken-down roof, I set fire to a couple of matches and looked about. The plank flooring was loose in many places, and over in one corner was a heap of refuse. A lot of snow had blown into the place.

Looking for a cache, as I was, it didn't take me more than a minute to see that over in one corner there was some snow which had been disturbed. The snow had been dug out, and then filled in again. A section of plank in one corner looked to me as if it might have been the instrument.

I was somewhat nervous. It was very dark in there, and it was possible that Greweski had discovered my tracks somewhere—might be watching, even then. If he had anything to hide——

Nevertheless, I set to work in the dark, lighting an occasional match to help me along. In five minutes I was down to the flooring. There was a crack where two planks joined, and I easily lifted them out. With a flickering match held down close to the space under the floor, I took a peek. What I saw made me curse viciously, in utter astonishment and such revulsion as I have seldom felt for any living thing.

For down there was food. There were a few cans of vegetables, a couple of pounds of bacon, a lot of frozen apples, and other things. No wonder Greweski seemed to show less signs of starvation than the others! He was robbing his own father and mother and cousin. Somehow or other, the time and the place and all that had happened combined to make all this seem like the most heinous crime I had ever heard of.

And that second I decided that the worthy Mr. Stanley Greweski would return to civilization with me, or shuffle off this mortal coil with me out in the middle of the lake somewhere. The girl had been right—and if I had anything to do with it, he would cease infesting Beaver Island with his presence.

I was thinking it out all the way over to the place where the smooth ice was supposed to be. I followed Greweski's tracks a while, but they led back to the house. I formed a plan which I thought the wisest one, and then fell to putting the pieces together as best I could.

I had thought that Greweski, for an instant, had not liked the idea of my going back to the mainland after food. He had food enough to last him until the breakup of the ice in late February or early March, and it was apparent that no one in the world, not even his own father and mother, mattered to him. It was a staggering thing to think of this handsome, magnetic fellow—but it explained the streaks of hard, glittering calculation which sometimes flashed into his eyes, and the face which sometimes grew bleak and masklike. But what an actor he was!

Another thought came into my mind. If he was so anxious that I remain on the island, in order to prevent any possibility of his whereabouts being known, it seemed almost a cinch that he had done something far more serious than he had admitted, and that, if necessary, he would jim up my ship to keep me from going. A little thing like starving four people to death, or thereabouts, for his convenience would not bother him, apparently.

Let me pause here a moment to say something: I am as well aware of certain facts, probably, as you are. Namely, that most of us are rather more gray than black or white, morally speaking. And you undoubtedly think that I was going too far in accusing a man of being about the lowest bozo unhung, on the evidence.

But listen. The day has passed when a successful crook or thug looks the part—ask any detective. The man who burgles your boudoir or tickles your ribs with a gat or walks into a bank and parks three cashiers and a few hundred vice-presidents in their wastebaskets while he robs the vault is very likely to be an inconspicuous man whom you'd never suspect of keeping a crooked dime. The city gunmen are usually well-dressed, immaculate little fellows.

And another thing: Talk about your tough gunmen of the old days, from Jesse James down, and your thugs in general, starting with the old privateers, and then consider the modern type.

I don't know an awful lot about it, of course, but I've run into 'em in various places, and I've talked with men who know. The deadliest, most cold-blooded, deliberately murdering yeggs ever known are our modern city hijackers.

Products of the slums, usually crazed by liquor or drugs, weasels rather than lions in their manner and method of preying on the public: They're the boys! Fifty dollars in any city will buy a man to shoot another whom he's never seen—you can fill vans with 'em.

And if you ever get a chance, just take a look at the perverted rats who do the gun work for the bootleggers on the Atlantic coast, or the Canadian border, or the southern border!

There are plenty of crooks who are good to their families, and murderers who'd go to —— for a pal. But I honestly believe that the nearest thing to an utterly no-good rat is the 1924 type of city gunman-gangster. They're cleaning up now, too. Ask watchmen of New York harbor, or prohibition enforcement officers who patrol the Detroit River, or dicks in the underworld districts of any big town.

Getting back on the main line again, there were a dozen different angles to the matter. Why had Greweski been so frank in admitting himself a fugitive from the law, even if he had claimed it was a frame-up? All in all, the brain was fanning and fogging along at a great rate as I tramped over to the other side of the island. I had my plan made, and figured that if the ship was out of order I could force Greweski to help me out a bit. And I had resolved not to spring my little stunt until the last minute. No use of bothering with a captive too soon.

The stretch of ice, to my infinite relief, was all right. There was perhaps a hundred yards of rough ice—cakes piled every which way and then frozen again into weird formations—but there was no open water. The old man had told me that it was safe to cross, so with a stick to make soundings, and proceeding cautiously, I went out and made a brief examination. It was all hard as rock, and the wind had cleared the hundreds of yards of smooth ice so that it was like a skating rink.

It would be a tremendous job to get the ship over there, and the skid proposition was a very delicate one, and the landing at the other end was something else again. However, under the circumstances, work or injuries seemed minor. An empty stomach knows no obstacles, and a broken arm is a small thing alongside a mouthful of food when one is starving.

When I got back to the house I approached it from the rear. There was a small light in one of the rear rooms, and without meaning to I glanced in. I continued for a moment, and got another surprize.

It was evidently Ethel's room, and on the crude dresser there was a complete makeup outfit—you know, those little boxes and jars of rouge and cold cream and that junk. Since the girls have formed the habit of powdering the proboscis as often as a man smokes a cheroot, with equal publicity, I've become familiar with vanity cases and lipsticks and other articles.

On the wall were hung several articles of clothing, like a pink kimono, for instance. All in all, it was a surprizing layout for a girl who had come to the island two years before because she was homeless and penniless, to live with her aunt and uncle out in the wilds.

However, I figured it was impossible to keep any girl from running true to type—probably she'd hounded her uncle into getting all that stuff on the mainland. At that, I don't imagine the Northern Peninsula numbers many lipsticks and pink silk kimonos.

The old folks were looking at me with their hearts in their eyes as I came in. Ethel smiled up from some sewing she was doing, an unfathomable look in her eyes. Greweski, his black hair shining like patent leather and his face like a too perfect cameo in the lamplight, looked up with a white-toothed grin.

"Any hope, Lieutenant?" he asked.

I didn't look at him, for fear he'd see what I thought of him in my eyes.

"Can do," I told them all. "Tomorrow the three of us have got to get to work making skids for the wheels and tailskid, and then it'll be a tough job getting the ship over there—have to cut down some trees, I imagine—but with some extra gasoline I can make it to somewhere where I can phone Selden and have some ships sent out with a load of food."

For a few minutes we made plans, and then the old couple went to bed. It was pathetic to see the new sparkle in their faded eyes, and their doglike gratitude to me. Young Greweski excused himself for a minute, and went into the bedroom with his parents. I seized the opportunity to whisper to Ethel:

"I've decided to do what you asked."

Her head came back slowly, and her eyes were glowing. She seemed afire at that moment. She leaned forward, and her hand fell on mine.

"I knew it!" she told me triumphantly, and her hand gave mine a quick pressure that sent the blood dancing through my veins.

To get to the point, I stooped over and kissed her upturned lips. She did not draw back, either. When I straightened up—I could hear Greweski's footsteps—I was ready to go to —— and back for that girl. With every look and action she reached the joints in my armor, for some reason. I was suffering, even then, from what most people call love, and which I was almost ready to admit right then myself.

When Greweski returned we chatted along for a while. He was greedy for news of the outside world, and I told him all I could think of. Among other things I told him about Cat Austin—the hijacker who has been devastating the bootleggers along the Detroit River and those unholy bootleg towns for months.

"We heard about him in Cleveland—he must be a crackerjack!" Greweski told me, and there was sincere admiration in his words.

"He's an outlaw of parts—and likewise a murdering hound!" I told him. "I'd give ten years of my life to get him by his red hair and kick him several miles to jail. I ran into him twice, by accident—and that's the reason I'm being courtmartialed right now. They finally drove him out, you know—or at least, he's not been heard of. There's a two thousand-dollar reward——"

"Tell me about it!" begged Greweski, his eyes shining.

There is something about a noted outlaw that has an appeal for any one, I guess. And Austin, or "Red," or "The Cat," whatever you want to call him, was famous all over the country for his brief and spectacular operations along the Canadian border. Even Ethel's face mirrored consuming interest—suddenly she looked more like the lithe, flaming girl I had seen first, with a gun in her hand. And he was a spectacular murderer who would particularly interest a rat like Greweski.

So I told them the same yarn I told you back at the beginning, in considerably more detail. And what an audience they were!

IX

STRANGE as it may seem, while I was telling that yarn I was recovering my right mind a little bit. They listened with absorbed interest, prodding me on with frequent questions. Greweski's eyes were sparkling, and he looked younger than ever, while the girl's lips were parted breathlessly.

They sure ate it up. Sometimes, as I looked at the young Pole, I almost doubted that I had ever seen that cache of food at all. Every time I thought of it I'd start freezing up, and getting murderous.

The main thing affecting my mental reactions, however, was the girl. Somehow that rouge and lipstick business hadn't hit me so well. I was sizing her up as I talked, and decided that she had a liberal supply of skilfully applied make-up on right then. And her dress, to my unsophisticated masculine eye, had not come from a country store on the Northern Peninsula.

I felt guilty of sacrilege in even thinking about such things, but I wondered what the explanation was. After I got her away from that island and out of the clutches of that snaky, cold-blooded young ——, who looked more like an angel, I'd ask her, I decided.

I was heartily ashamed of myself because my attitude of always wondering what skullduggery any woman, or man either, was up to should even affect my opinion of a glorious girl, who, as she sat there, typified to me everything fine in womanhood.

Finally it seemed that we had squeezed the last word out of Cat Austin and his goings on. Greweski got up and said:

"How about a drink? Honest to —— liquor—my father's had it for many years."

Naturally, I was on my guard. Knowing the man as I did, and realizing that he was apparently distinctly averse to my leaving the island, it didn't take any telepathist to decide to peek around every corner before turning it. Nevertheless, I said yes. I wanted to see whether there was any monkey business afoot on that balmy winter evening.

Looking back on it now, I realize that Greweski made a fatal error right there. If the girl had handed me my drink——

When he poured the drinks, his back was toward me and I could not see the glasses. I figured like this: If he didn't want me to leave the island, for fear I would bring rescuers back, or at least give out plenty of information as to his whereabouts, the simplest way to arrange it was to cripple the ship or motor.

He was a drug fiend, and if he had not brought an ample supply of the fragrant poppy derivative in some form, he'd be as crazy as a waltzing mouse by this time. So he had dope. Why not dope me, and have a free hand tinkering with the De Haviland?

Anyway, I took my drink. So, likewise, did Ethel. Evidently, I thought, the Polish people are brought up with liquor in the home.

"Excuse me—be with you in a second," I remarked, getting up. "I like a chaser."

I went over to the water bucket, took a dipperful of water, said a hearty "how" when Greweski proposed my health, and threw the liquor into my mouth. I followed it immediately with some water, and spewed the whole mess back into the dipper without removing it from my lips. With all the grace and aplomb of a ten-twenty-thirty rep show leading man I emptied the dipper into the bucket provided for liquid leavings, and smacked my lips over the liquor. Gosh, how I wanted that drink, too!

I watched Greweski like a hawk, but I could detect no sign of elation or expectancy. The girl seemed to have a queer expression in her eyes—I could not figure out whether she was trying to warn me of something or not. I made up my mind to ask her whether she feared anything from him, because of me, but I never got the opportunity. That is, not until we went to bed, and by that time my busy brain had proceeded to rid itself of the notion. Some instinct in me always bids me be a lone wolf if I can.

In matters of delicacy and finesse, as it were, I desire to confide in no one. They talk too much—and I've been fooled too many times. If I had all the money I have lent to good friends, whom I trusted financially as much as I do the Bank of England, I'd have a couple of thousand dollars instead of being in the constant position where I couldn't buy spaghetti enough to lace my shoes with if it was selling for a cent a mile, and I was starving to death.

"We have only two bedrooms, and I sleep with my father and Ethel with my mother. But we can make you comfortable on the floor, if you don't mind," he told me.

I didn't mind, in fact, sleeping in the room where we were, with the only door in sight all the time, gave me an advantage. I didn't know quite what to do, or what my part was, so I steered a middle course and pretended to be very sleepy.

Greweski gave me an old mattress and a lot of blankets. They said good night—and the last thing I saw was Ethel, throwing a slow smile over her shoulder at me that was enough to drive sleep from me even if I had been doped.

Lying there on the floor, my stolen gun alongside my hand, waiting for a possible move from an outlaw, whom I was convinced was as dangerous and utterly unscrupulous a bozo as I had ever run into, I thought things over again. About the girl, mainly. And strange as it may seem, I commenced to get hold of myself.

Such a tiny detail as the make-up started me off, and then, somehow, that —— fool kiss I had planted on her lips didn't set so well, either. She had accepted it as if somewhat experienced. Funny how a man's mind will work, isn't it? I still got a big kick out of her, and I was as sorry for her and as determined to help her as ever.

In fact, I was fascinated by her. But somehow I succeeded in placing her along with ordinary stunning girls. I think the idea of an unspoiled, unsophisticated girl, marooned in the wilderness and knowing nothing of life in the outside world, had shoved me temporarily into a feeling that was far different from the regulation kick a man gets out of a good looking girl who appeals to him.

Thrill of discovery, fragrance of utter innocence, the opening of the bud and its blooming into a flower—you've read all that three-for-a-nickel mush—but, gentlemen, emotions immediately adjacent to such ideas have pushed many a man over the line from a mere high fever into husbandry.

It was two hours later, and I, tired as a dog, was preparing to make ready to begin to start to decide that I didn't give a —— what happened; I was going to sleep, when Greweski made his move. Had I not been alert, I wouldn't have caught it. As quietly as a ghost the door opened.

For a full minute the vague outline of his head against a window at the rear of the house could be seen. I breathed regularly, and clutched the gun. Apparently satisfied, he walked across the room and put on his mackinaw and boots and a fur hat. The fact that he made no unusual effort to be quiet convinced me that I was supposed to be doped.

He had no sooner gone out the door than I was getting to my feet. I pulled on the several yards of trousers it takes to cover my elongated shanks, and went to the window. He was mushing along toward the ship in a leisurely manner.

I watched him for thirty seconds or more. He was making a bee-line toward the ship—there could be no mistake as to where he was going. He was taking no chances of letting me get away to tell any tales whatever, and had done me the personal favor of deciding to cripple the ship instead of me.

Suddenly the door into one of the bedrooms opened, and a line of wan candlelight fell into the room. I whirled, gun in hand, to meet the business end of a rifle in the hands of Ethel Aldi.

I was utterly dumfounded. I stood there like a ninny, or two of 'em rolled into one, and simply muled and puled and gawked and gasped at her.

"Drop that gun, put 'em up, and keep 'em there!" she snapped. The rifle was under her arm, and one finger was on the trigger. She held a candle in the other hand, and walked toward me.

"I didn't think you took that drink, but he would have his way!" she went on calmly. "You ain't such a sap as I thought!"

I regained some portion of my lost self-possession, and in four winks I had the explanation. I finally said:

"So you don't hate your friend so much, eh? Helping him out while he makes sure none of us can get off the island—and everybody starve to death but him!"

"Boy, how you fell for that line, didn't you? I had you helpless as a jellyfish. Fell for it like a dog on a piece of meat. Figured you were going to make the country girl, eh? Let me tell you, Lieutenant, or Sergeant—titles are the same in the police as the army, ain't they?—you'll never get Stan off this island! If the ice don't break we may starve—but you'll never take him! And you can count yourself lucky if he don't croak you, right sudden! He may let you live and leave you in charge of his father for a few days after we leave."

"His father'll never be alive," I remarked. "So I guess I start for my eternal roast, eh? Well, sister, let me congratulate you. You had me fooled. You fooled me almost as bad as your sweetheart is fooling you!"

"Whaddye mean?"

That question was so sharp and high-pitched that it was like a scream. I had reached her where she lived—and I give myself credit for a little bit of fast thinking that had hit the bull's-eye with a crash.

Naturally, the lay was easy to figure. Uncertain who I was, the girl and Greweski had deliberately framed that little yarn I had fallen for in an effort to worm information out of me. They had done it with artistry, too. She had tried to tempt me into an attempt to carry him off with me, and had succeeded in getting my consent, thus showing that I was not above mixing into whatever sinister mess there was on the island.

It was as plain to me as my own nose is on my own face that the girl was Greweski's wife or sweetheart, and that she was utterly mad about him. All these underworld boys have their molls. Having fled with him to this island, and standing starvation and all the rest for him, topping it off by deliberately helping to force me into staying, meant that she'd gone the limit for the man she loved.

Even then I wondered what utter desperation could force people into such measures to maintain the secret of Greweski's hiding place.

My only chance to get out alive was to get to that ship before he had ruined it. My only chance to get there was to get away from the girl. My only chance to get away from the girl was to make her my ally against him.

These puissant pearls of wisdom meandered through my medulla oblongata in jig time, and likewise the original thought that hell hath no fury like a woman scorned. Consequently, my remarks as notated herein a few words back.

Time was so desperately short that I was forced right into my story. When she asked that question I hesitated not on the order of my answering.

"Fool you! I'll say he is! Do you think that fish thinks anything of anybody, including his own parents and you? If you do, you're crazy. When I went over to the ship I followed his tracks. They went to a little cabin out there somewhere—and in that cabin I found a supply of food he'd stowed away for his own use while you, and his folks, were starving in front of his eyes on a bunch of apples! And you're holding a gun on me to keep me from nailing him! Where do you think you'll ever get off with him—if he can do a trick like that!"

I knocked her dizzy. There, in the candle-light, with that makeup off her face, she was still good-looking, but somehow in the tiny wrinkles and the sag which came in her face as she looked at me, wild-eyed, there was sophistication so profound that it made me feel like a child. A woman who didn't know anything couldn't have looked like the stricken thing before me. She was fooled—and had thought she knew everything.

She half-swayed on her feet, and the gun in her hands was forgotten. Her really wonderful eyes flamed into mine like those of a cat at night, and she fairly spat the words:

"You're lying! He——"

That's as far as she got. I shot the works on a big gamble, banking on her mental condition. I jumped at her, and my hand was on the barrel of that rifle when she got around to shooting it. I twisted it out of her grasp, and she jumped at me like a tigress. I caught her in my arms, threw her on the shakedown I had occupied, and jumped out the door with the rifle in my hands just as I heard the quavering tones of Mrs. Greweski asking what was the matter.

I burst back into the door to get my boots. The two women remained as silent as statues in the gloom as I pulled them on. Then, with nothing on me but underwear, trousers and boots, I set off.

I didn't care to proceed on his trail, at night. At first I figured he didn't have a gun with him—I had seen none—but on second thought it seemed almost inevitable that he had one, for use in case of emergencies. And in a duel at night—he'd be bound to hear me coming—he'd have at least an even chance to pop me off. And if neither one got the other, my lot on the island would be to starve to death by myself, so to speak. He had been walking leisurely, so I took a chance. I threw the rifle in the snow, because I had my stolen Colt, and set off at a long-legged lope, circling. I thought I could make it, perhaps, before he did.

I was right. I was wet with sweat when I got there, so exhausted that I could barely walk, and utterly out of breath. I got to the ship, approaching it from the side opposite the house. It had been a two-mile run, and I was absolutely all in.

No sooner had I curled in the cockpit, with a peephole poked through the canvas with my finger, than I saw him coming. I was fairly sobbing for breath. My whole body shuddered every time I inhaled some ozone. I waited until he got close, and then forced myself into fairly normal breathing.

He was within ten feet of the ship when I snapped to my feet, gun in hand.

"Anything I can show you about it?" I asked. "Put 'em up!"

His hands had been in his pockets. He withdrew them like a flash, and our guns spoke together.

I say "together." Mine was a split-second in advance, and I got him. I believe that he had started to spin around just as he shot, because he didn't hit me. I saw I had winged him, so I made a flying take-off, with one foot on the edge of the cockpit, and launched myself at him. Wherein I was a —— fool. I should have shot him.

His back was to me as I leaped, but he was on his feet and the gun was in his hand. He was staggering. I hit him as if I'd been shot from a gun, and down he went in a heap. He lay motionless, my knee pinning him down and my hands tearing at the gun. I got it away, although he had a death grip on it, and threw it to one side.

I thought I'd killed him. The next second I knew better. With a mighty heave he unseated me, and was fighting me in a mad fury that I have never seen equaled.

I was far from being in the pink. I was exhausted from my run, and I had had a pretty tough day, as days go. I struggled out from underneath him, and soon we were clawing at each other on our knees in the snow. He got to his feet like a cat, and before I could get up he knocked me flat with a terrific swing. He landed on top of me, and I felt his hands on my throat.

Under the spur of those vise-like fingers I got control of myself. I have been in pain, but never anything to compare with the utter torture of having air cut off from my already aching lungs. I could have lifted all the elephants under the Big Top off my back then. I struggled up, and tore like a madman at his hands, and got them loose.

Some way I couldn't get set after that. He gave me no time. He was on me like a mess of monkeys, and why he didn't finish me I don't know. His nails were tearing at my eyes, and whenever he got a chance he was kicking—below the belt. Hijacker stuff.

I knew beyond a doubt that I was fighting for my life. We struggled and heaved, most of the time, down in the snow, and all I could do was hold on, and gasp for breath. I felt weak and sick, and there was a fog in my brain. Finally a terrific kick in the stomach laid me flat. For the moment I was done.

As I laid there, utterly spent and in agony, he staggered to his feet. I had felt blood on his clothing, and wondered how long he would last. Now it seemed that he, too, was helpless for a moment. As I twisted and turned, he looked down at me, and swayed on his feet.

His face, contorted with rage, was that of a demon, it seemed to me, but possibly that was a fantom of my reeling brain. He was gasping for breath, too, and had his hand clamped to his side.

I put forth every effort of will to try to get up, but I couldn't. He watched me, his chest heaving rapidly. In his eyes there was a curious, mad, gloating light. It made my flesh creep. I could see he was merely waiting until some of his strength came back, with his breath.

I think those eyes of his were what saved my life. Gone were vague realizations that I was fighting for life itself —— dim shadows in the back of my brain. I was looking down into Hades when I looked up at his eyes.

I came to. Gathering myself under the drunkenly swaying Greweski I knocked him off his feet with a swing of my arm. There flowed through me that mysterious energy which comes to a man when it seems he has gone the limit. I got his throat, and I choked him into unconsciousness.

I can't think of it now without feeling a crawling disgust at myself. The pain that filled me and fairly made me groan, all that I knew of my victim, the whole warped, sodden, repugnant business turned me into a raging beast, and I choked him with savage delight, glad to pass on to him some of the torture he had caused me.

Finally he lay quiet, his face distended and his tongue out. You men who recoil at the mere mention of murder, never having had reason to plumb some of the depths within you, listen to me when I tell you that I barely saved myself from choking that unconscious outlaw to death, deliberately.

It was ten minutes before I felt anywhere near normal. When I saw a figure coming slowly from the woods and deliberately walk toward me over the moon-silvered snow I took hold of my Colt, leaned against the ship, and waited numbly. I wondered whether the nightmare would ever cease, and I nearly came to believe in ghosts.

I would not have been surprized at anything. Had the approaching person been Christopher Columbus inquiring for America I would have merely said, "good evening." It was only Ethel Aldi, however, and she had been to the shack to prove the truth of my statements to her.

"Did you get the ——?" she enquired, and never have I heard an expression from human lips that sounded so utterly, revoltingly obscene as that comparatively mild word that fell like a hot coal from her lips.

"Not dead—wounded. I'm glad you found out I was telling the truth. Let's bind his wound and carry him home."

She hated him now, with a hatred no man can comprehend, I suppose. She wanted to leave him there to freeze. Then she went into hysterics. I let her howl while I fixed up the bullet hole which had drilled his right side. A half-inch furrow was plowed right through the flesh, and he bled like a stabbed porker.

She was merely crying when I finished. She was so weak from starvation she could scarcely walk. I lifted him to my shoulder, and it took us a solid hour and a half to go two miles across the snow.

I said absolutely nothing, and neither did she. Curiously enough, I was utterly blue and down in the mouth. Why, I don't precisely know. I had won, and there was a fighting chance that I could get out of the place alive. Perhaps the spectacle of that stricken woman behind me, and the thought of what was ahead with his parents, was responsible.

Tragedy lay like a pall over that quiet island—the kind of thing that most of us never even glimpse. I could feel it, even though the nearest I ever came to shedding tears was when I dropped my last three cigarets into the Rio Grande down in the Big Bend one time, with a forty-mile walk on a crippled leg ahead of me.

When we entered the cabin the old folks were waiting. Mrs. Greweski was crying, and the old man was patting her shoulder. She was swathed in a voluminous flannel wrapper, while he was arrayed in a thick nightshirt and nothing else.

"Vat—vat you do?" she croaked, and then, as she saw the blood on him, she dropped to his side in a passion of weeping. The elder Greweski's painfilled eyes flickered from his son's body to my face. He was suffering like a dumb animal.

I said nothing, but helped Mrs. Greweski wash and rebind the wound, which was unimportant if it was not infected. Then I started talking, feeling uneasy under the stony gaze of Ethel Aldi.

"Don't feel too badly, Mrs. Greweski," I said, as slowly and distinctly as I could. "Your son admitted to having done wrongly—I've got to take him back. It wasn't very much he did, so he won't have to suffer too much. He's not hurt, and it's only right he should pay the penalty if he breaks the law. Then, when he comes out, he can start over again, and not worry all the time."

I couldn't bear to wring their hearts with mention of the food, and the full extent of the man's infamy. Finally I succeeded in quieting them, and after repeated protestations of my regard for them, and that sort of thing, I really was in the position of a friend of theirs on whom they leaned. And all the time the girl, the woman rather, over in the corner listened, as though her soul was numb.

Without warning she sprang to her feet, and with hot tears in her eyes and her jaw working convulsively she poured forth a torrent of speech.

"Oh, ——, why don't you tell 'em who he is, and who you are, and the kind of a bum he is!" she shrieked. "I'll tell 'em their son is Cat Austin, and what he did! I'm sick of this—this——"

She burst into Polish, and I was too surprized to try to interrupt her. It was Cat Austin I had captured! At first I couldn't believe it. This man's hair was black, for one thing—then in a flash the utter simplicity of it came to me. He always wore a mask—he had been an actor—a red toupee and mustache was every bit of it. The simplest thing in the equipment of a thug, disguise, applied before instead of after the crimes.

The sweetheart of the unconscious hijacker had reduced the old folks to tragic bewilderment while I stood there and mentally doffed my befeathered kelly to the audacious, artful machinations of young Greweski.

Frankly admitting that he was a fugitive from the law, throwing me off the trail a million times, the frame up with the girl, listening so absorbedly to my stories of himself—no wonder he was the well-known man he was. Had I not sensed his opposition to my leaving, and had sense enough to leave no stone unturned by trailing him to the shack where his food was, I would have been like a lamb in his hands.

Very much bewildered, I turned to and tried to do my best for the old folks. My tail was between my legs. When I looked at them, and thought of all the grief I had brought to them, I felt I'd be a perfect team-mate for Judas Iscariot.

X

I WAS in a quandary what to do with Greweski-Austin while his father and I made arrangements for my dash over the lake. I was afraid his mother or perhaps even Ethel Aldi, despite her obvious hatred, might take a funny woman's notion to help him out. Having been fooled so much and so often, I was in shape to look any gift horse in the mouth—and use a microscope to do it.

But Greweski solved the problem himself by getting so sick he was on the ragged edge of dying. Delirium, fever, and all that. I found his dope in his suitcase, and we administered him a ration of it according to his own directions in his sane moments. I hid every firearm on the island.

It took five days to make skids for each side of the undercarriage, and the tail skid, and get the ship over to the ice. We had to cut down a lot of trees to get it through, and it was terrific work. We were gambling on success, and ate fairly well out of the small stock of food left.

Ethel Aldi hated me like poison. It was easy to see that. Not a one of the four but believed I was a detective in disguise who knew how to fly. I fostered the impression, finally—gave me more prestige in the matter in hand and I figured that they'd think the law had Austin spotted, and that if I didn't return other minions of the government would arrive.

I had to wait three days more to allow Greweski to get well enough to make the trip. Ethel, little by little, told me the whole story. He had been the juvenile in a burlesque troupe of which she was prima donna. He had been in love with her as much as it was in him to be with any one, and she had been mad about him. Even then he was a dope fiend, and had peddled the stuff here and there. Finally trouble started, and he had to skip. She went with him. He had innate criminal tendencies, it seemed, and he settled in Detroit and was soon engaged in bootlegging. Then the hijacking, of which she really knew little. The idea of the wig and mustache had occurred to him right at the start and because he was a really fine actor, who would have undoubtedly made his mark on the stage, it was a success.

But he never confided any of the secrets of his work to her—where he had secured his boat, where he kept it hidden, or who the men in his gang were, except Frazier, the tall boy. He had got the others.

She had not known that he had double-crossed his gang until Frazier arrived on the scene, not by accident, but deliberately, to have revenge. Greweski killed him and then went out over the lake in the motor boat and dropped in the body, with weights on it. The motor boat had been wrecked on some rocks on the return trip because Greweski was too full of hop.

With fifty extra gallons of gas in the tank, the motor warmed up several times to make sure it was O. K., and Greweski far enough recovered to make the trip, there came the day for the attempt. There was about three days' scant rations left on the island.

The motor was going, and the three of them stood around the ship—Ethel stony, Mrs. Greweski crying, the old man drooping as he stood there. I had figured that the worst was over, but it was not, apparently. The mother was weeping like a lost soul. Greweski, whose hands I had tied securely behind him, asked to have a last word with Ethel Aldi.

They talked for ten minutes. I kept my face to the front, but I knew she was crying, finally. They say hatred and love are but few emotional inches apart, and I guess she flopped back into the love of her youth, so to speak, under his influence. Perhaps he had been working on her all these days, and the final blowoff was too much for her composure. And a woman in love is a funny creature to figure out.

I finally insisted that we start. Her face was anguished, eyes wide and mouth half open as though about to shriek. I gave the ship the gun, and hunched down in the cockpit with as great a thrill as I've ever had in flying. Nothing to do but wait and see, now.

We got under way with maddening slowness. Finally the Liberty got in its work, overcame the inertia and the friction of the clumsy skids, and we picked up speed. I waited until the last minute to rock her, but when I did pull back on the ship she took the air, loggily. I picked up speed across the rough ice, and we set sail for the small city of Grayson, on the Northern Peninsula, eighty miles away.

Ethel Aldi did it. She admitted it later, but I didn't do anything about it. I was five thousand feet high, only ten miles from Grayson, feeling half delighted that the terrible trip was over and half-scared at the landing ahead of me, when all of a sudden clutching hands were around my neck, choking me. Those sturdy bonds, absolutely impossible to get out of, I thought, were no longer on Greweski's hands. And he, knowing that execution waited for him, inevitably, had nerve enough to take one last desperate chance on a wreck.

He had unstrapped his belt, and was leaning over me. My hands left the stick, and groped for my gun. I couldn't get it—his fingers left my neck and twisted my arms from behind. The De Haviland was roaring downward in a terrific power dive.

Suddenly he allowed my hands to go free, and commenced pounding at me with his fists, trying to get in a knockout blow. Seeing the futility of this within a few seconds, he went for my gun. I had it half out, and his hands were after it.

The ship was quivering; about to fall to pieces. I had to use one hand, momentarily, to shut off the throttle. Only twenty-five hundred feet high, now, and the ship about to break into pieces. The speed was way over two hundred miles an hour.

With him over me like that, there was no chance for me to get the gun into action—and we would crash within a few seconds. I felt instinctively that he would never give up. So I did the only thing I could.

I curled one foot around the rudder, and jammed the other against the rudder. It seemed that the wings would snap off—why they didn't I don't know to this day. For a moment his grip loosened, but strapped as I was, I couldn't make even a half turn. The next second we were spinning downward in a tailspin.

That settled him. He was nearly thrown out. He had to hang on desperately. I loosened my belt, clung to one cowling like grim death, and with my long arm and the gun at the end of it pounded him to a pulp while the ship spun earthward.

I pulled out a couple of hundred feet of the ice, and ten minutes later, with a town of three or four thousand people looking at me goggle-eyed, I made a safe landing on a strip of smooth ice which, thank Allah, Confucius, Buddha and their assistants, held us up.

XI

THE end of the tale is funny, at that. Greweski has been executed, of course—and told nothing. He seemed to enjoy his notoriety, and fostered the mystery which surrounded his operations. I got food back to the island, all right, and found that the old folks had found over a hundred thousand dollars in cash hidden in the house.

They paid back the bulk of the money to three banks, but kept the rest, and now are living peacefully in Detroit. I collected the two thousand reward. The bootleggers didn't come across. They never do, unless they can't help it.

My court martial was a matter of form only. Jim Tuttle was much relieved when my wire from Grayson arrived, he tells me.

Just a few days ago Ethel Aldi was in Detroit. She capitalized her notoriety, and now is starred in a burlesque show. The last time I had seen her, at Greweski-Austin's trial, she confessed privately that she had cut his bonds while talking to him. He must have been a hound with women, at that.

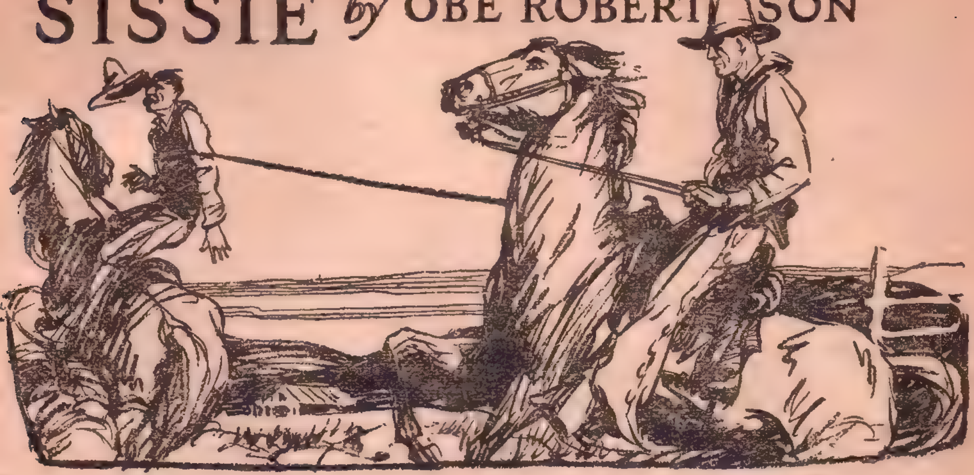
She claims that all she figured on was his making a last desperate break for freedom after we landed, and that sounds reasonable. She told me she hated him like rat poison, and yet would always love him. Tie that one.

I went to the show. She's an eye-filling sight in tights, at that. I sat down in the audience and laughed long and hard. Not at the show. At myself. Once, when she was starving, I had thought her spiritual-looking! Food fixed that up.

I guess I'll always be the sap of my family tree. And that, so far as I know, is every bit of it.

SISSIE

by OBE ROBERTSON



AT THE top of the last ridge which commanded a view of the rough, choppy valley he had recently quitted, "Sissie" pulled up his sweating horse and gazed cynically back along his trail. For a minute or more he sat motionless in the saddle except for the purely mechanical movements of his fingers as he deftly rolled a cigaret the while he watched the dozen or more little moving dust clouds that spread out fanwise in the middle of the valley as they approached.

He could not see what was causing the dust clouds, but he knew—knew that in the center of each little cloud was a member of the pursuing posse. And then, though his eyes were still focused on the approaching dust clouds, another vision possessed his mind—the haunting picture of the huddled form of a man, motionless and bent backward until the head and heels seemed almost to meet.

He cursed softly and wished the thing would stay out of his mind. He regretted that the thing had happened, but more on his own account than on account of sorrow for his victim. He had not meant to commit murder, but now that it had happened he was glad that the man was dead; only he wished he had met his fate from another source. If only old Chief could have thrown Bill Lundy and broken his neck or crushed his skull with striking fore foot, Sissie would have rejoiced.

"Sissie"—a strange name for a Western bad man! But then Sissie was a strange individual. The deep, narrow-scaped eyes bespoke a fanatic. Predatory as a wolf and as cunning, he had one redeeming virtue—a kindliness toward animals that amounted to a passion. Despite the fact that he could prey upon his fellow men with the cold ferocity of a cougar he was mild-mannered and reticent to a marked degree, except that cruelty to animals invariably threw him into a deadly rage against the perpetrator; though many times the guilty one frequently failed to sense the deadly menace behind the softly spoken remonstrance. His frequent protests against cruelty to animals had earned him his nickname, and it was one of his hair-trigger bursts of temper that had gotten him into his present predicament.

The thing had happened naturally enough and now Sissie knew he had always felt that some time or other something of the kind would happen. Being chased by a posse of armed and angry men thirsting for his life conveyed no sense of novelty, surprise, or excitement to his mind; though, no doubt, a participating cause for this feeling was the fact that for several years he had been systematically engaged in cattle, horse and sheep stealing.

Bill Lundy had caused the flare-up five hours before, but the events that led up to it began several days before with the prosiac arrival of a new man at the cow camp. Because of a shortage of horses in the cowyard Sissie had been requested by the range boss to "cut his string," by one horse, for the benefit of the extra man, who was Lundy himself, hired to do extra riding because of the unusually large number of cattle that had died from eating wild larkspur, necessitating the cattle's being herded away from certain high meadows where the poison was prevalent. Because protest was useless Sissie had consented with apparent good grace, but his resentment was keen. He loved his horses, and Bill Lundy was a notoriously brutal horseman.

Every one of Sissie's horses was apparently gentle, but every one of them had some time or another been an outlaw. It was the wild, unbreakable ones that appealed to him, and gradually he had taken over every bad horse belonging to the outfit he worked for, and he had gentled them all. Instinctively they seemed to sense that peculiar sympathy or fellow feeling which he had for them, and the worst bronco quickly responded to his will. But there was one thing about them all which he knew, and which others did not. Their loyalty was given to him, and they viewed all other men with distrust.

The horse he had elected to part with was a high-backed bay called Chief. There had been a time when he was a famous bucker, and he had had a none too playful habit of jumping on a fallen rider, but by dint of much patience and kindness Sissie had made of him a good cow-horse, and the horse's tumultuous past had been forgotten by all save Sissie. He alone knew that at the first sign of abuse or violence Chief would revert to his oldtime habits. His secret hope was that old Chief would at once demonstrate that he was not to be promiscuously handled. That Lundy might be badly injured bothered him not at all.

The horse's watchful, suspicious eyes and the quivering of his flesh whenever he was touched should have warned Lundy to be easy with him, but it had the contrary effect. He jerked and kicked the horse around the corral for a quarter of an hour before he got him saddled, and so as soon as he climbed aboard he was ignominiously bucked off. The timely intervention of the other riders alone prevented him from being trampled to death under the horse's pounding hoofs. Sissie alone remained aloof, watching proceedings with a dour and sardonic eye.

But Lundy was not to be so easily beaten. He had caught the horse again, and this time, before mounting, he tied up one of Chief's front feet so the horse could not get it to the ground. Sissie had ridden over to the range boss and had given one of his soft-voiced protests.

"Aw, let him alone," the range boss had growled. "A hoss like that needs tamin'."

Without a word Sissie mounted his own horse and took down his rope.

Lundy again swung on to Chief's back, and the horse, being on three legs, was helpless. Then followed an exhibition of cruelty and brutality that made Sissie see red. Lundy's sharp-roweled spurs let little rivulets of blood out of the horse's sides as he mercilessly raked from neck to hip, and a heavy quirt rose and fell rhythmically about the horse's head.

Suddenly, with the ferocity of a she-wolf defending her whelp, Sissie flung his noose over Lundy's head, pinioning his arms to his body, and dashed away as fast as his horse could run. Lundy was jerked from the saddle and his body bounced like rubber as he struck the ground. Fifty yards farther his head came in contact with a bush and he was jerked crosswise of the trail, his knees striking a tree on the other side.

Sissie released his dallies as soon as he felt the sudden impact, but not soon enough. Lundy lay in a horribly grotesque position, and he did not move.

* * *

SISSIE felt as a man might feel who had just taken a drink of water after a long, consuming thirst. There was a sense of odd familiarity about the scene as if he had rehearsed it often before, and he seemed to know instinctively what to do. All of the other men had leaped to the ground and rushed over to Lundy, and Sissie realized that delayed pursuit was preferable to hasty flight. Wheeling his horse, he cut in between the men and their horses and, slapping each horse in turn with the ends of his long bridle-reins, sent them on a lope past the camp.

At the door of the tent he swung off and got his gun. He had no rope or he would have caught Chief and let his foot down regardless of his own danger. But, he reflected grimly, they could not overtake him on Chief while the horse was on three feet, and if they let the foot down Chief would see to it that the pursuit would be considerably delayed. Dropping in behind the other horses, he fired a few shots and got them to stampede.

Not until then had the excited punchers noticed what he was doing, and by that time they were irretrievably left afoot. By the time they rushed to camp to get their guns Sissie could afford to laugh at them disdainfully. For a couple of miles he herded the saddle horses ahead of him, and then they began to scatter and give him trouble, so he left them. Whether the men at camp would elect to follow him on foot in the hope of regaining their horses or whether they would walk to the nearest cow-camp to give the alarm was immaterial. In either event he would have at least an hour's start, and that was all he asked for.

When he stopped on that last ridge he had been five hours on the way, and he realized that the posse had gained on him rapidly; but that caused him no uneasiness. He was wise in the ways of horses, and knew that as his own mount had been ridden only at moderate speed he was still comparatively fresh, while at the heartbreaking pace which his pursuers were taking their horses would be completely jaded by the time they reached his present point of vantage on the top of the divide.

His cigaret rolled and lighted he waved his hat in derision and trotted his horse rapidly down the slope into the next narrow valley. The distance across this valley was nearly twice that which separated him from the posse, but by the time his enemies reached the top of the divide he had disappeared among the foothills on the other side.

His horse was badly winded after the wild dash across the floor of the narrow valley, but now Sissie again let the horse take it easy. He rightly surmised that the posse would waste considerable time searching the breaks between the two valleys on the assumption that the fugitive, finding himself so closely pursued, would attempt to double back. At any rate he knew they must lose considerable time searching for his tracks, and they could not overtake him even if they were fortunate. The immediate danger, he figured, was over; he must now look ahead toward ultimate escape.

He was now in the edge of the sheep country, and steadily climbing into a mountainous, timber-covered region. Somewhere in this vast wilderness was a sheep outfit with whom he had in the past been associated in various crooked deals. He could stay with them until he found a way to slip out of the country. He did not trust the outfit, nor did he flatter himself that he would be welcomed with open arms, but he knew that they could not afford to allow him to be apprehended because of the things he knew concerning their own activities. The difficulty in his way was that sheep outfits were continually roving and it might be hard to find them.

The only thing to do was to make inquiries of sheepherders and campjacks whom he might meet. At the first camp where he stopped neither of the occupants spoke English, but at the next one he was more successful. The herder was willing enough to talk, but Sissie dared not mention the name of the outfit he sought, for fear of advertising his destination. But he knew the topography of the country and by asking what outfit was on this creek or that mountain, or in such and such a cañon, he was able, by a process of elimination, to narrow things down considerably. But all he could learn from this herder was that the outfit he sought was said to have been on a certain creek two weeks before.

Sissie knew that the news of his passing was sure to spread, and he determined to turn it to his own advantage. After making his round-about inquiries from each man he met, he would casually mention the fact that a cowboy by the name of "Sissie" was wanted for murder, and was said to be at large somewhere on the sheep range. The fellow had stopped at so-and-so's camp for dinner and been recognized, or he had carried away blankets and provisions from somebody's camp. Each time he told the story it varied a little from the previous recitals, especially in regard to the place where the outlaw had been seen and what the fellow was said to look like. Because of the nature of his business when he had previously been on the sheep range he had been careful to avoid being seen, and so he knew that the chances for his being actually recognized were negligible.

No, he always said, he had never met this Sissie, nor did he care to. But he had heard a great deal, and from what he had been able to learn the outlaw was a desperate character and killed from sheer love of it. It was said that he had killed sheepherders for the mere pleasure of seeing them kick. In fact sheep-herders were his favorite game.

He would ride on; knowing that before he was out of sight the round-eyed, news-starved shepherd would be crashing through the brush eager to carry the rumor to the nearest camp. Before the sun went down the story would be retold many times, and each time it would grow. By the time the sheriff arrived rumor would have filled the woods with Sissies. So contradictory would be the stories that no credence could be given those who really spoke the truth.

It was after sundown when he at last got word of the outfit he sought, but it was still several miles away when darkness overtook him. Deciding that night riding might be dangerous he sought out a small, mountain meadow where the sheep had not yet penetrated and staked his horse. Then he wrapped himself in his saddle blanket and went to sleep.

AT DAY-BREAK the next morning he arose half numbed by the cold and saddled his shivering horse. He was haunted by a nameless fear; a sense of depression which reason told him was groundless. He knew that the posse could not track him, and the wild stories he had set afloat would foil any officer who might venture into the mountains. Indeed, in that wild labyrinth of hills and timber he would be perfectly safe for months even without the protection of the sheep outfit he sought, but the feeling of impending trouble persisted. At first he blamed it on the lonesomeness and the unfamiliar environment of the big timber, and the chill of the early morning. But when at last he came out upon an open ridge into the cheerful sunlight he could not shake the feeling off.

A couple of miles farther along he abruptly came upon a sheep camp nestling in a clump of trees beside a tumultuous little creek. He was close enough to recognize the two men he was looking for, but their actions puzzled him. They were running and jumping about among the trees, and occasionally dodging back to a small fire close to their tent. Sissie could make no sense of their actions. Like all cowpunchers he had a more or less vague contempt for all sheepherders. Somewhere in the back of his mind was an impression that sheepherders frequently went crazy. True, he had never personally seen a crazy sheepherder, but these two certainly acted like it. However, crazy or not, he decided that he could make them shelter him to save their own hides.

He had dropped out of sight in the timber immediately after first sighting the camp. When he emerged after riding a hundred yards the camp was squarely in front of him. He brought his horse to a sudden stop, and glared at the scene in front of him with horror and rage in his eyes. A coyote was caught by one front foot in a steel trap which was fastened to a pole in the hands of one of the men by a short length of chain, and the men were torturing the snarling, snapping animal with an iron rod which had been heated red hot in the fire.

They were going about the business with an ingenuity that was nothing less than fiendish. Along one side of the coyote the word killer had been burned in irregular letters, but that had been the mildest part of the torment. The helpless creature had been blinded, and each time the hot iron would be poked at it, it would instinctively snap at it. The poor brute's tongue resembled a huge hunk of badly cooked meat.

"We'll teach yuh t' kill our sheep, yuh murderin' beast," one of the men chuckled fiendishly as the tormented coyote bit at the iron he held and let it go with a whimper of pain.

Those were the last words he ever uttered. With a snarl of rage not unlike that of the tortured coyote Sissie drew his gun and fired point-blank at the man's broad back. The fellow collapsed without a sound. So interested were the men in their sport that they had failed to notice Sissie's arrival.

The other man dropped the pole and leaped inside the tent, while the coyote started dragging the trap and pole toward a dense covert of chaparral only a few feet away.

In the few seconds which it took the second man to reach the tent and his rifle Sissie could have shot him down. But one thought dominated his mind to the exclusion of all else. The maimed coyote must be put out of its misery before it reached the brush, else it would die a lingering, fearful death. He fired one shot at it hastily, and missed. He took more careful aim and fired again. This time the coyote got into the edge of the chaparral, but the dragging pole no longer moved. Sissie exhaled a breath of relief, but it ended with a gasp.

Almost simultaneously with his second shot the man in the tent had brought his rifle to his shoulder and fired.

Slowly Sissie slid from the saddle, and with a convulsive effort turned over on his back and lay still.

The camp-mover walked over and prodded him with the gun barrel. Then, satisfied that his man was dead, walked over to the body of the herder. But Sissie was not dead. As the camp-mover turned away he feebly raised his gun with both hands as though it were some ponderous weight, and fired.

The sun was hours high when a visiting campjack found the three dead bodies. The coyote, lying concealed on the edge of the brush, he failed to notice. He turned the bodies over and discovered that every one had been shot in the back.

"Now, how the —— could that have happened?" he wondered.

PIEGAN WAR PARTIES

by Eugene Cunningham

HORSE stealing, rather than scalp taking, was the motive for war parties of the Plains Indians—of the Blackfeet, at any rate. The *Pi-kun-i* (Piegan) tribe of the Blackfeet was very warlike. Except in the bitterest Winter weather war parties were afield hunting enemy camps. While running off horses was the principal object, when enemies could be killed without too much danger—and contrary to general belief Indians weighed desirabilities pretty carefully—the warriors were perfectly willing to lift scalps.

Among the *Pi-kun-i* the war party usually originated in a dream. A man would say:

"In my dream I saw many horses on a certain stream. They have been given to me. Now I am going after them. Who will go with me?"

Men who believed in his medicine's strength—and his force of character—determined to follow him. The female relations began to make moccasins, the old men to furnish arrows, powder and ball. Before the party set out the members sang the "peeling a stick song" which is a "wolf-song."

They built a sweat-lodge and gathered inside it with some old medicine-pipe man who had been a good warrior. The old man filled the pipe and prayed and sang and poured water on the hot stones. The warriors sliced bits of skin and flesh from their bodies, from arms or breast or tongue-tip, as offering to the sun. After the ceremony all plunged into the river.

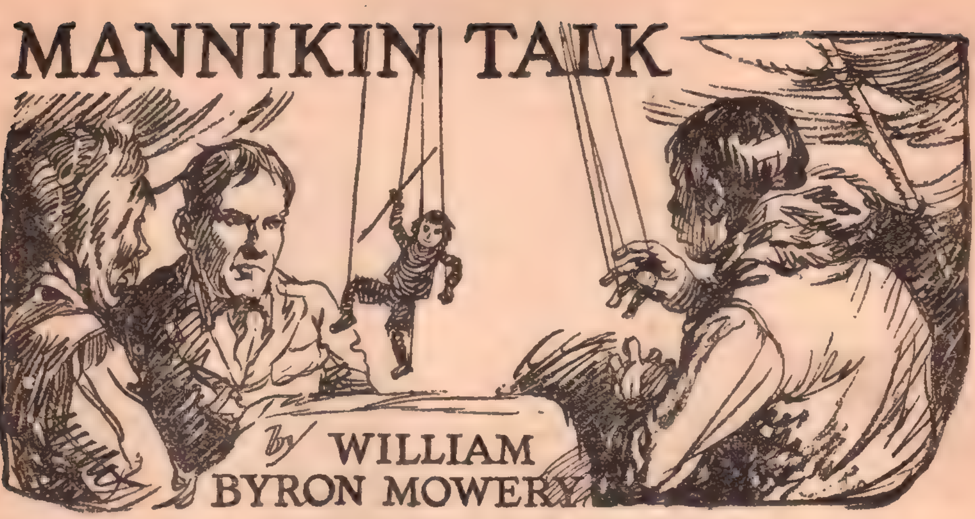
War parties started out afoot. The grown men carried their arms, the boys bore the moccasins, ropes, food—dried meat and pemmican—coats, blankets, war-bonnets and the otterskin medicine.

The party often marched in the daytime at first, but sometimes, if the leader were very cautious, by night only. When arriving in enemy country no fires were built, raw food only being eaten. Scouts overlooked the country from high buttes and when they reported a village the leader commanded the men to paint themselves and put on the war-bonnets. The last instruction was only a figure of speech. The bonnets, being decorated with brass bells, could not be worn in a secret attack. So, before painting, the bonnets were laid on the ground, and when the warriors finished painting the bonnets were tied up again.

At dark the party started on the run for the enemy village carrying ropes, whips, guns and blankets. Certain "strong hearts" accompanied the leader into camp to get horses. The rest waited outside, on guard, and to catch loose horses. Individual daring showed now; some warriors took only one horse while others cut loose every one tied about a lodge. Some ventured into camp only once, while others went again and again.

Once the horses were secured the party drove the animals slowly away, then mounted and rode off fast. Usually they traveled two nights and a day before daring to halt for sleep.

MANNIKIN TALK



by WILLIAM BYRON MOWERY

Author of "The Scout," "The Ghost Track," etc.

IT WAS late evening and a snow storm, fury-driven from the crown of the world, gripped the Arctic coast, when Corporal Adoue with his four-dog *komatik* snowshoed into the Eskimo village.

Not even a seal hunter had seen him and hurried homeward with the news; his coming caused them a stunning surprize. A wave of excitement gripped the primitive Aktogmiut, as his team squatted on their haunches. The high chattering of babies, the barking of splendid big dogs, the soft "*ool-ool-ool*" of surprize from the almond-eyed women, and guttural grunts of a dozen stocky men greeted the *kabluna* whose legs were striped with yellow.

Adoue looked keenly into the circle of faces to gather a preliminary hint of how they received him. He was coolly aware that the success of his mission and very possibly the safety of his own life could be foretold by that reception. Intuitively he felt the pulse of the tribe. They guessed his purpose. They resented it. But they were not hostile. Rather they were tense, wary of him, and expectant.

The Innuit village, set down on the coast within reach of the seal holes, was formed on three sides by the dozen igloos and on the fourth by the *kozgee* or council house, built of caribou skins and banked man-high with warm drift. The Aktogmiut numbered a dozen warriors and twice that count of women. Clannish and isolated, they were cemented rock-solid by ties of blood.

Their lonely strip of coast two hundred miles north of the Arctic Circle and two hundred east from the Mackenzie mouth was still untouched by *kabluna* ways. Their weapons, their customs and their child-like notions would have furnished a page in man's cave history.

After he had responded to their repeated "*aksunai*" of welcome, Adoue turned to his team to unhitch and feed Yuk and the three younger dogs. But already two men had untoggled the bow lines and examined the pads of the malemutes; and a third was bringing frozen tom-cod. Hands were willing to help the visitor. He was offered food and oil and water, and the hospitality of every igloo. They let him do nothing for himself.

Adoue accepted the offer of the Innuit, who, he shrewdly guessed, was the chief hunter; and followed him into his snow hut, crawling over the dogs that lay in the warm tunnel entrance. The *illillegahs*, of whom the hunter had an igloo-full, were tossed on the sleeping platform out of the way.

The three wives, one old and two very young, brought the *kabluna* hot seal beef, oil-soaked fish, and the sharp, palatable stomach contents of a moss-fed caribou. After he had eaten, his host took him to the *kozgee* where all the hunters were waiting.

"Word came to the white man's fort," Adoue began, speaking the dialect slowly, "that Oghok has killed another man—Hwik, a Kiktuk hunter who has been living with you since winter hunger destroyed the

Kiktukmiut. Twice before we have sent men to take this killer, and twice he has hidden in the hills and you would not say where. When I go back, he will go with me."

"Our igloos are open for you to look," the chief hunter replied innocently. "Oghok is not here."

"That I know. But I do not know where he is hiding. I am waiting for you to tell me."

"Oghok is gone. Not a one of the Aktogmiut has seen him since he stuck his ivory spear through Hwik, the Kiktuk hunter."

"Your words are false," Adoue replied tersely. "Through a dozen storms now, I have watched this village. A half-moon ago I picked up his trail, leading away from here. He had come and gone in the night. I followed him eastward over the sea ice to the great bay. Just when I was hottest on his trail, a storm came suddenly and blotted it out of my sight.

"My lead dog followed his buried tracks as far as the bayhead where the three rivers meet the sea. There he lost them. Oghok has not ventured into the open again since I was close on his heels. It is as idle to search among the hills for him as to look for the raindrop after it has fallen into the sea. But he was here only a half-moon ago."

"It is true," the chief hunter admitted with chagrin. "He came for food. But we do not know where he is hiding."

"Your words again are false," Adoue interrupted. "He cannot go far from his hiding; your hunters have been placing seal oil and meat for him where he may get it when his trail will not show. Not a one of you does not know where he is. To all of you he is a blood brother. But a killer who kills for no reason at all must answer for what he does. I can wait no longer for him. Oghok must go back with me to the white man's fort."

"It is not our way of justice," the chief hunter replied heatedly. "If Oghok kills, it is between him and the man he slays. Why is the quarrel yours?"

"Why was it concern of ours when the last moon of Flying Frost found your igloos empty and we sent you food?" Adoue retorted. "Was it our quarrel when Oghok killed a warrior of the Goat Indians and we sent ten men with guns to keep them from going to your summertime lodges to slaughter your women and children while your hunters were gone after the white whale?

"Our concern is to keep peace and deal fairly. The quarrel of all the weak and defenseless is our quarrel. I must have Oghok, the peacebreaker. You must tell me where he hides."

"We do not know," the chief hunter replied stubbornly.

The other Aktogmiut nodded.

"If you do not tell, I will make magic to find where he hides."

"Your magic has failed for a long month, *kabluna!*"

The answer was nonplusing.

Adoue felt a solid wall of silence settle around him. He was an intruder. Oghok was one of them. His cold-blooded killings were of small moment in that primitive society where human life at best was incidental. Tribal integrity was the one law.

He tried adroit questionings, threats, promises. Always the answer was—

"We do not know where Oghok is."

The wall of silence was exasperating. Two others, wily old foxes of the Service, had failed to break through it. He had not exaggerated about the uselessness of searching the hills for the killer. Unless the Aktogmiut told where Oghok hid, he could never be taken. Adoue began to feel the sting of defeat. His bluff about magic had come to a miserable pass.

Cooling his temper, he chatted of other things for a show of friendliness. For several minutes he had been hearing a low wailing in an igloo close beside the *kozgee*, but had paid little heed. Now, in a lull of the storm, he heard it distinctly.

"Mourning!" he exclaimed to himself. And aloud to the chief hunter: "Who is that?"

"Anitla, Hwik's widow, who has gone to the igloo of his brother."

"His brother?" Adoue asked in surprize.

"Yes. Katahka, the other Kiktuk who has hunted with us since all the other Kiktukmiut perished from winter hunger."

The Innuit pointed across the *kozgee*.

ADOUE'S eyes fell upon a man of forty-five, a strong Eskimo in the prime of life; whose features showed him quicker of brain than the Aktogmiut he lived with and showed also that not cowardice but a sure knowledge of what would happen to him and his family, kept him from avenging his brother speedily.

Across the corporal's mind flashed the thought that this Katahka, of all the hunters, would tell where Oghok was hiding. He remembered having heard that several years past, when the Kiktukmiut lived nearer the Mackenzie mouth, their hunters had often come in to trade.

"Ha!" he exclaimed angrily, looking steadily at Katahka. "Until your name was spoken, I did not know you. Now I remember you are the hunter who owes us more furs than you can trap in a winter."

Katahka started; his head snapped back proudly. He opened his lips to speak.

"Do not deny it!" Adoue rasped. "Or I will go to your igloo and take not only your furs but all your weapons and dogs in payment!"

For a moment Katahka's face was blank bewilderment. Then a shadow of understanding flitted across it. He hung his head meekly.

"It is true. I do not deny it, *kabluna*. You can go with me and look in my igloo and have all the furs there, if you but leave me weapons and dogs for the hunt."

"Good!" Adoue snapped.

As Katahka got up, the chief hunter, watching and listening suspiciously, gave a gestured order. Two Aktogmiut rose to go along.

Adoue swore softly at this balking of his scheme.

"I am too tired to count furs tonight," he interposed, sitting still. "But tomorrow—" as if speaking of the pretended debt, he lapsed casually into the trade jargon which none of the Aktogmiut could possibly know—"*Mika wa-wa nika kah ipsoot okook kokshut* (You must tell me where this killer is hiding)."

Again he caught a motion from the chief hunter. It was a slight gesture—finger on fifth rib—but he guessed it was a threat of death, for Katahka sat down again quietly and answered in the Innuit:

"I do not understand."

"I but remembered you have two wives to keep now and will need your things," Adoue interpreted.

Hope of talking with Katahka was completely spiked. Any attempt would surely cost the man his life. A dozen pair of eyes were upon them constantly. They knew the *kabluna's* motive; they knew Katahka's vengeful desire to aid. The corporal had reached his *impasse*.

He was on the point of going out and putting up his silk tent. He wanted a few hours of unbroken sleep before starting back; and the *kozgee* crawled with small eft-things, whose intimate and personal acquaintanceship he had made in his three-years sojourn overseas.

He would rather have gone to his own funeral than back to the fort without his prisoner. He knew why he had been sent after Oghok, when two old-timers had failed. He had heard his inspector at the fort say to a department superintendent—

"Why the —— do I get all these World War heroes, Major?"

"I've got to stick them somewhere, Captain. Pressure is put on me to give 'em jobs in the Service. I have observed they get cold feet up here quicker than at posts nearer the Outside."

"Quite true, but hard on me, Major. This Adoue, for instance, is the seventh I've had. He's stuck; may have stuff; but likely is sticking because he can't get away. He'll be packing when the River opens. Won't be my fault if he don't!"

Remembering this gloomily enough, Adoue watched the antics of a small seal-gut mannikin, a *keetunka*, which a young hunter had made and was manipulating.

Suspended cleverly by elastic strings from a lodge pole, the toy man tumbled, wrestled, and danced in grotesquely life-like fashion under the skillful fingers of the Innuit. The other hunters looked on with rapt attention, applauding a dextrous twist, and deriding failure at making the *keetunka* stalk a seal properly.

Katahka reached over, took the mannikin away, and gave such a masterly exhibition of seal-stalking that the hunters roared and demanded more. He grinned hugely and sat absorbed in his play. The tiny figure on its snow platform imitated animals, told hunting stories, and pantomimed even the ages-old legends of the Innuits. Adoue wondered how the man could find pleasure in such a bauble when the murder was unavenged and his brother's widow was mourning a dozen steps away.

Child-like, the Aktogmiut tired of the toy after a while and turned to other amusements. But the thing was new to the *kabluna*.

Suddenly, watching Katahka, he realized

that the innocent play had become a desperate game.

He took his eyes away, then, and began telling tales of the white man's great war to the chief hunter. In a moment his narrative about the "green wind of death" had the ears and eyes of every one; even of Katahka, whose hands played idly with the mannikin while he listened.

Adoue sat on his heels, recounting vivid stories that were yet fresh in his memory. He talked with hands as well as with tongue, because the dialect was faltering on his lips and because he had to keep eyes from straying.

As his glance went around the circle of drop-jawed listeners, it lingered each time for a split-second on the mannikin. In those split-seconds it too was telling a story—a story so disjointed and fragmentary that even had the dozen pairs of eyes been watching, they could scarcely have pieced it together; for only when the *kabluna's* eyes rested on the *keetunka*, did the real story progress. At other times the pantomime was a jumble of clownish gymnastics.

As Adoue told of a bayonet rush and a retreat, Katahka was narrating how Oghok had thrown his ivory spear and pulled it out of his dead victim. At the corporal's next glance the mannikin was scurrying eastward. On its platform it described a crescent to represent the bay-head. It dodged into the mouths of the three rivers there, and chose the middle one. It repeated the scenes, again and again and again, till the meaning was unmistakable.

For several minutes Adoue kept his face resolutely turned, till the restless eyes of the chief hunter came back to his story of the great gun. When next he looked, the mannikin was weaving in and out to follow the bends of the frozen stream. Shortly the river forked. The figure dodged into the left branch, but came out and took the right. Step by step it climbed past the overfalls of the mountain torrent. Adoue counted. At the sixth the *keetunka* faced right and shot an arrow.

The corporal finished his story leisurely and yawned. His listeners had inched up till they sat almost at his feet.

"But this flying Kraacken monster that you tamed and taught to drop death—" a hunter prompted hungrily.

"Nay, we fashioned the monster with our own hands, and another that hunted under the sea, and another that crawled like a turtle over the land and had a hard shell. But I am sleepy. Let Katahka go with me now to help set up my tent."

It was a deft stroke, if any eye had possibly noticed the mannikin talk. It showed that the *kabluna* still thirsted for the knowledge which Katahka could give if he dared.

"Katahka is busy with his toy," the chief hunter interposed. "Your tent will be set up while you tell us more of the gun that shot farther than a man can run in a day. How can that be? How could the *kablunas* your enemy see where to shoot?"

"They made *kabluna* magic, and could see everything," Adoue replied. "I will make a little of it tomorrow and find Oghok!"

IT WAS evening again when Adoue *komatiked* into the Eskimo village, but this time he stopped only a few minutes to eat and drink; for his sled was burdened by a fur-swathed figure the sight of whom brought cries of astonishment from the Aktogmiut.

Adoue had his reasons for bringing his prisoner back through the Innuit camp. It was not bravado on his part. Chiefly he wanted to give the tribe its first lesson about the infallibility of the Service, and the inevitable fate of a killer. He wanted also to see if any one suspected Katahka.

Though he was one man against a dozen, his sudden, dramatic appearance with his prisoner awed them till they trembled under his glance. Not a finger was stirred against him. He took his man boldly into the council-house and ordered the Aktogmiut to give him food.

"Your magic is greater than our magic," the chief hunter observed meekly, looking ruefully at the trussed-up Oghok. "Since you left us this morning, our *shaman* has not ceased beating his *sowyuna*. It is useless. Never again will we try to hide information from you."

"It is useless," Adoue agreed. "You have learned wisdom."

When he was just ready to leave the *kozgee* for the long trek home through the bitter, still cold, his eyes fell upon Katahka in a corner.

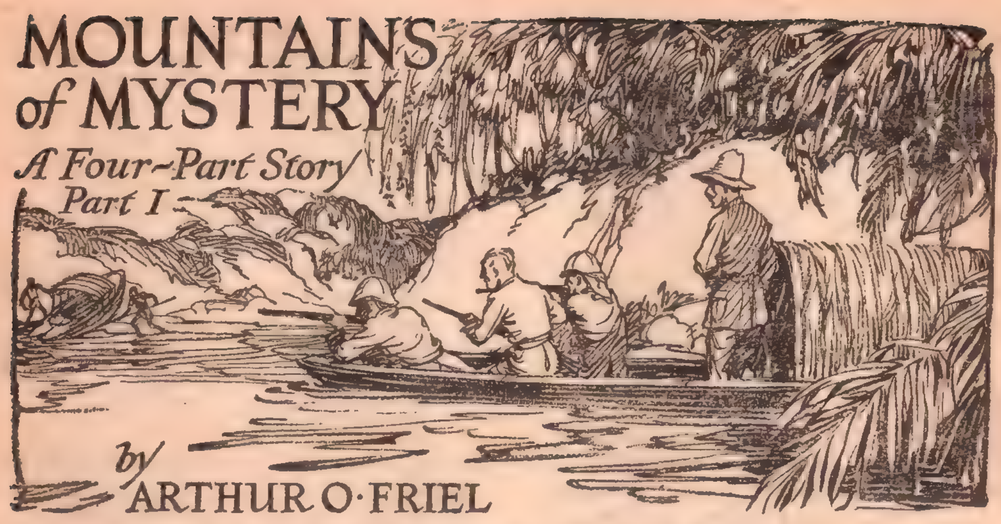
Adoue looked twice—and swallowed his laugh discreetly.

The mannikin was dancing on air with a string around its neck!

MOUNTAINS of MYSTERY

A Four-Part Story
Part I

by
ARTHUR O. FRIEL



Author of "The King of No Man's Land," "Tiger River," etc.

CHAPTER I

MAROONED

THE moon sank.

Behind a black bulk of cloud, looming like a tremendous dragon couchant on the rim of the world, the brilliant disc slid into eclipse. Along the irregular back of the cloud-beast flamed a bright, cold fire. Then the weird radiance paled, died out. Across the tropic wilderness of Guayana swooped darkness.

Dimmed by a thin veil of mist, stars looked wanly down on a chaotic land of disordered mountains—some peaked and ranged, others flat-topped and isolated; on rolling wastes of barrens, on wide sweeps of jungle; on a network of rivers, writhing and twisting, sometimes creeping as stealthily as serpents, sometimes snarling over rapids and roaring down cataracts—ceaselessly hurrying northward, westward, or southward to escape the harsh uplands and lose themselves in the encircling Orinoco.

On all this night-shrouded expanse the scattered eyes of the sky dwelt with faint interest; for everything there was as it had been nightly for thousands of years. But over one of the myriad rivers their gaze grew a little more sharp and bright. There, in midstream, on a small sandy playa left temporarily bare by receding waters, lay little dots which had not been there on the previous night: the forms of sleeping men.

Four of them there were. Three, resting side by side on outspread rubber ponchos, slept with light blankets loose-wrapped from shoulders to feet. The fourth, a little apart, had neither poncho nor blanket, but was completely muffled in a length of old sail-cloth. Close beside each of the three lay a rifle. The other man apparently was unarmed. A few steps away stood a tiny cooking tripod, beneath which were a few charred fagots. Near it rested an aluminum kettle and a small heap of unused fuel. And that was all. No fire, no food, no boat. On either shore, vertical clay banks heavily grown with tropical timber. Above and below and close beside, empty water. Four men marooned on a few square rods of sand.

These things the stars of the heavens saw. And down on the earth, other stars also saw them. Twin stars, these were; malignant, evil stars which glared from the top of a shore-wall. They moved along the bank, appearing, disappearing, glaring again, and again vanishing. After a time, from the thicket where they had gleamed, broke a harsh cough. Several times that ugly noise rasped. Then it was heard no more.

The form in the sail-cloth moved. From the shapeless huddle protruded a head. It listened intently. Somewhere far off sounded a hideous laughing noise. Some where nearer whistled the unutterably sad plaint of a sloth. Two or three fish-splashes broke the quietude of the water. The listener sleepily subsided. But he did not again cover his head.

Over where the evil stars had blazed, a long shape crept with incredible silence

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"Mountains of Mystery," copyright, 1924, by Arthur O. Friel.

down the sheer bank. Projecting tree-roots, gnarled or sinuous as petrified snakes, gave foothold for its taloned paws. The few small blobs of clay dislodged by its movements fell with almost inaudible plops. In the darkness, the creature itself was invisible now that it had veiled its glare. And presently it was gone from the shore.

Across the smooth current grew an angular ripple. At its apex, steadily nearing the playa, moved a wicked flat-nosed head. Its eyes now did not glimmer; their lids were drawn to malevolent slits. Its jaws worked soundlessly, already writhing into the grimace of attack. Under the surface swam those great hooked paws. Nearer—nearer ——

Again the man moved. He rose on an elbow, peering fixedly across the stream, straining his ears. In all the sounds of the night, some faint, a few more noticeable, was one which was not right. Just what or where or why it was, he did not know. But something ——

"Crra!" he gasped.

His cover flew aside. Headlong he dived toward the nearest sleeper—snatched his rifle—threw himself up on one knee. The gun darted to an aim; hung motionless for a fraction of a second. And up from the shallows of the shelving playa rose the ferocious head which had made the ripples.

A shot cracked.

A horrible snarl retorted. A fierce swash and splash—the beast came on, hurling itself to the grapple. The man leaped erect. Again his gun-flame slashed the dark. Then he sprang aside.

The three blanketed men were up now. Bedding swirled in air, steel glinted, quick ejaculations sounded. Two thumps terminated the swirl of motion. One was that of the brute, which staggered and flopped as the second bullet struck home. The other was that of the rifle, descending in a terrific blow on the beast's back. Only the quick dodge of the rifleman had evaded the eviscerating sweep of the giant paws. The great cat, still grimacing, died on the spot where the man had just stood.

FOR a moment none spoke. Every eye, every sense, was fixed on the dead destroyer. Then the man beside it relaxed from his tense poise. His teeth gleamed in a shadowy grin.

"*Un tigre*, señores," he casually remarked.

"Gee cripes!" rumbled the shortest of the three. "I'll say it's a *tigre* and a half! And right on top of us before we knowed it!"

"Good work, Portonio!" heartily commended the second, lifting his head. "Straight shooting and a sharp eye. But I thought you said no *tigres* were here."

"Few, señor," Portonio mildly corrected. "I said that on this Rio Ventuari they were few. So I was told, and I believe it is truth."

"Begorry, if them few are all big go-gitters like this here one, there's plenty for me!" asserted the stocky fellow. "I've seen plenty o' *tigres*, but I never knowed one to swim a river to git to me."

"He was hungry," Portonio laconically explained.

The tallest of the trio, standing straight and soldierly despite his rumpled condition, had said nothing at all. His keen gaze had studied cat and man, glanced across the water at both sides, dwelt again on the quiet Portonio. Now he turned his head, as if seeking other men. Then he wheeled abruptly and stood staring downstream. At the same moment Portonio, as if smitten by the same thought, started and squinted past him.

"*Ajo!*" he swore. "*La lancha* ——"

"Boat's gone!" finished the tall one.

A swift about-face by the other two. Then a growl from the short one.

"Wal, the lousy bums! They've deserted and took everything with 'em! And here we laid like a string o' dead fish and let 'em git away with it!"

For another minute or two the others said nothing. They peered about them, striving to pierce the farther gloom, listening in vain for voices or other sounds of men; scanned the sands; looked into one another's faces. All three keenly studied the fourth, Portonio. His return gaze was square and steady.

"*Capitán*," he calmly reminded, "I too am here."

The tall captain nodded. But the short man growled again.

"Looks fishy to me, Cap. He's stuck here, same as we are, but— He was awake when this cat come. Why was he dead to the world when them guys sneaked ——"

"Oh, pipe down, Tim!" interrupted the man next him. "He's in the clear. He's been with us all the way up the Orinoco. He got those two mestizos at San Fernando only because we wanted him to. He slept farther from the boat than we did. If anybody ought to have heard their getaway, it's you! You were nearest to them. Quit your bellyaching."

Tim grumbled something, but subsided. The captain nodded again.

"You heard nothing, Portonio?" he asked.

"Nothing," echoed the Venezuelan. "Nothing until the *tigre* woke me. He barked over yonder." His head tilted shoreward. "Then I nearly slept again. But I heard a thing—the breathing of the *tigre* as he swam—*sí*, that was it! It puzzled me, and I looked and saw his head. So I took the gun and shot."

He extended the borrowed weapon, butt first. The captain—it was his gun—declined it.

"Keep it for the time," he said curtly.

Portonio's strong teeth showed again in a pleased grin; for he knew, without further words, that the tall commander had faith in him. The latter drew out a watch and scanned its faintly glowing numerals.

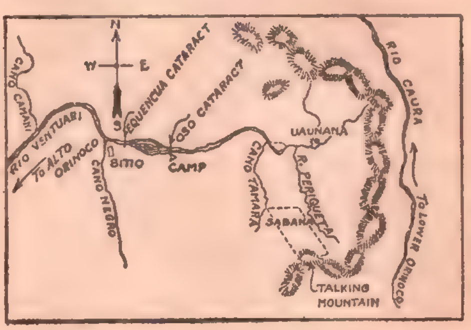
"Nearly four," he announced. "Not long to dawn. About an hour and a half. Can't do anything until then. Might start up the fire and stew some *tigre* meat. That's better than nothing. Got some matches, 'Merry'?"

"Guess so. Portonio, make a fire."

With a grunt of assent, the Venezuelan lounged back to his place on the sand and picked up a naked machete. At the little woodpile he deftly made kindlings. Ignited, the sticks gradually flamed up into a goodly blaze. Into its light the big cat was dragged, and by that light were revealed both the superb proportions of the beast and the faces and physiques of the marooned men.

Even in death, the jaguar was formidable: A muscular-bodied brute, seven feet from tip to tip, whose powerful legs, massive paws, and hooked claws bore eloquent testimony to its ability to twist and break the necks of creatures much heavier and stronger than mere human beings. The sinister savagery of its destructive build, merciless head, and cruel mouth was enhanced by its funeral color; for, unlike the usual dappled animal of its class, it was black as night—an embodiment of stealth, gloom, and death.

Breast and head now were dyed red from wounds. The first bullet, striking a trifle low as the brute rose from the water, had drilled through the thick-thewed chest. The second, more luckily placed, had gone through an eye into the brain. And even then, with its center of life destroyed, the beast had almost made its kill in the last few seconds of existence.



Portonio, its slayer, now viewed it with a slight smile, but with no particular show of interest. The firelight disclosed him as a bronzed giant, curly-haired, square-jawed, brown-eyed, clad in a loose cotton shirt and baggy trousers, and barefoot. The others, though sunburned, were lighter of skin than he, and only one of them—the tall, gray-eyed, stern-faced man whom he addressed as *capitán*—was black-haired.

Tim was florid of face and of hair; blue-eyed, wide-mouthed, pugnacious of jaw; broad of shoulder, muscular of build. Merry was a pronounced blond; slender, yet strongly knit, with a hint of the dreamer in his curving lips and long-lashed eyes. Even now, with the loss of the boat and all it contained hanging heavy on the minds of all, this golden-haired fellow was smiling with care-free satisfaction as he contemplated the great cat.

* * *

"A BLACK one, Rod!" he rejoiced. "They're rare. I'll just have to undress this chap and take along his hide."

"What'll ye take it along in, and where to?" demanded Tim. "The only way we can git anywheres now is swimmin' and walkin'—and gosh knows what'll grab us while we're swimmin'. Hey, Tonio, is there any o' them big water snakes in this here river?"

"*Culebras de agua?* Men say there are

many, señor. I do not know. I never before have been on this Ventuari."

"The cat swam over here," reminded the captain. "We can swim over there."

"Oh, yeah. And then what do we do? D'ye mind the bank's like a wall, straight up and down? It's like that for miles. That's why we tied up here in the middle. How do we git topside?"

"Oh, just climb," retorted the blond. Sinking on one knee, he unsheathed a keen belt-knife and began deftly slitting the skin. "Cheer up, you old grouch! Luck's with us yet. Here's a lot of meat. We can ferry it ashore somehow, smoke it well, and live on it for days while we walk. And I'm betting something will turn up."

"Yeah. Prob'ly one o' them big snakes." Tim scowled at the mysterious darkness, doubly dark now by contrast with the fire's glow. As if in answer, a rushing splash sounded not far off. Tim jumped, clutching his rifle tighter. Portonio smiled slightly, casting a nonchalant glance outward.

"A large fish, señor," he explained.

"There, there, little man!" sarcastically soothed Merry. "Was mother's lamb afraid of the darky-dark and the boogy-boos? Come here and let mamma wipe his little nosey——"

"Aw, shut up!" flared Tim, reddening furiously. "I'll wipe *your* nose on me fist, ye big stiff!"

Merry laughed mockingly. Portonio chuckled. Even the iron-faced captain smiled. After a minute Tim himself grinned a little, though he cleared his throat harshly to conceal it.

"Take a run down the river and beat up those two halfbreeds," advised Merry. "That'll sweeten your temper. Bring the boat back with you."

"Umph! What I'd do to them birds if I got a holt of 'em! But, say, come to think of it, they can't be so far off, at that. They dunno how to run the engine. How are they goin' to make their gitaway? She's heavy, that boat is, and there's a bunch o' sand-bars— Say, mebbe they're aground somewheres, right close by! When it comes light we'd better trail down the bank and see if we can nail 'em."

"Right," vouchsafed the captain. "That's what I had in mind. We'll get 'em if it takes a year. The only way they can navigate her is by poling, and that's slow work. The fools!"

Tim again eyed the dark.

"It'll be hard goin' in all that tangle. Aw, wal, we've got out o' worse scrapes than this here, many's the time. Wonder why they didn't knife us before they beat it."

"Afraid to chance it. One of us would be sure to wake up and shoot."

The blond now had stripped a haunch. From it he carved slabs of flesh, which he tossed into the kettle.

"Portonio, put this to boil," he instructed.

The Venezuelan, with his usual slow smile, carried the pot to the water's edge, returned, set it on the tripod, and squatted to tend the fire. The skinning proceeded. The captain and the red man produced cigarets, lighted, and squatted also. Presently the kettle began to bubble. Tim gave a reminiscent chuckle.

"Funny, ain't it, us three comin' back to tiger-meat?" he said. "Mind the time we went battin' round the bush down on the Amazon and got up the Tiger River? 'Twas fair crawlin' with cats. And we run out o' meat and had to live on them *tigres* till we made our big gold-strike. And now here we are, all of us rich as mud, comin' down here jest to do a little explorin' to pass away the time—and plunk! we wake up broke and stranded. Money to burn in the bank up home, and a fat lot o' good it does us! We're down to chewin' the tough ol' cat-leg again, and glad we've got good teeth."

His two mates smiled, but made no answer. While the blond worked absorbedly at his task, the gray-eyed man squatted with gaze far away. Portonio, incurious, continued his imperturbable watching of the fire.

At length the big black pelt was off. After spreading it out and washing knife and hands, the blond straightened his blanket on its poncho and lay down. The other two joined him.

"Daylight pretty soon," remarked the captain.

"M-hm. And then cat stew without salt. Ugh! And no coffee. That's what hurts my feelings worst. If we catch those two sneaks I fear my temper may be unmerciful."

"So'll theirs," grunted Tim. "And they've got guns, mind ye."

"A fact which will make our proceedings

much simpler." The blond man's tone was hard-edged.

"Yeah! Ye said a mouthful that time. No questions asked. Shoot on sight."

For awhile they lay quiet. At length the watching stars grew a shade paler. Across the sky sped a faint sheen. Rapidly the eyes of the night closed; the light brightened; the sky turned to a glowing blue. From towering jungle, root-studded clay walls, and olive-green water the shadows were wiped in a trice. And from the river forest, near and far, rose a discordant chorus of monkey bellows, turkey moans, toucan barks, tapir whistles, and nameless gobbles and rattles, screams and hoots. With one accord the three sat up and fell to adjusting their sleep-disheveled clothing.

"Now come on, bugs!" gloomily invited Tim. "Our skeeter-nets are gone with the boat. And come on, sun! Helmets are gone too."

A blaze in the east heralded the coming of that malign sun. And a sudden myriad of moving specks announced the arrival of the bugs—a stinging horde of tiny day-mosquitoes which would attack ceaselessly until sunset. The three stepped into the thin smoke of the fire, where the insects would be fewer.

"Umph!" grunted Tim, eying the stew-pot in distaste. "I'm hungry, but I dunno about eatin' that. If we only had some salt——"

"Which we haven't," clipped the captain. "Portonio, take it off the fire. Let it cool. Then we'll claw it out with our hands and worry it down."

With the last remaining stick the cook swung the kettle from the blaze and set it on the cool sand. Rising, he stretched himself, his warm brown eyes traveling smilingly from face to face and reading the expressions there.

"I have eaten worse things, señores," he comforted.

"So have we," admitted the blond. "But not lately."

For several minutes they stood in the smoke waiting for the unpalatable meat to cool. Then Portonio, stooping to test the breakfast with a finger-tip, let his gaze rove upstream. In that bent position he froze, his gaze suddenly fixed and sharp.

"*Mira*, señores!" he murmured. "Look!"

CHAPTER II

LOCO LEÓN

LOW-RIDING, slow-moving, down toward the marooned men floated a dugout canoe.

It had crept stealthily around the next bend, a quarter-mile upstream, and was drifting near shore. Its black body, rising but a few inches above the surface, blended with the dark water; its low curved cabin of bleached palm-fronds merged with the yellowish dirt wall. Its crew, bent low and peering at the playa, made only an indeterminate blob against the shadow within the cylindrical hood. Along its gunwales moved no paddles. The river-beast was warily reconnoitering, keeping itself so inconspicuous that, but for the chance discovery by Portonio, it could easily have withdrawn unseen by the smoke-wreathed men on the sand.

Now those men sprang forward, shading their eyes beneath their palms for a few seconds, then raising their hands and waving them in imperative gestures. From them broke a chorus of shouts. Only the Venezuelan remained silent, still studying that creeping craft whence sounded no response. After a little, however, he relaxed into his usual easy poise and his slow smile dawned.

"What the —— ails them guys?" grumbled Tim. "Ye'd think we had smallpox, the way they lay off. He-e-ey!" His voice rose again into a foghorn bellow. "Come here, ye poor fish! *Aquí!*"

No answer. The canoe floated at the same creep. But now, deliberately, a figure arose and stood before the cabin—a blue-clad, sombreroed form which remained motionless for minutes. The Americans grew silent. Then, quietly, spoke Portonio.

"It is a señor. See the carroza on his boat. None but a señor uses a cabin here. I think it is 'Loco' León."

Lifting his voice in a riverman's hail—not loud, yet musically clear and long-drawn—he called:

"Ho-o-o-o-o! *Amigos!*"

Now came a reply, curt and incisive.

"*Quién es?* Who are you?"

"Por-tonio Ma-ri-ño," rang the slow response.

As if the name were a countersign, the drifting men dropped their suspicion. Paddles rose and fell. The canoe surged forward, a small creamy roll forming under its overhanging prow, a quick cadence of gunwale thumping strokes beating in unison. The three Northerners looked queerly at their employe, who, though he had professed ignorance of this river, was so readily recognized. In a moment, unasked, he gave an explanation.

"It is Loco," he declared, still watching the canoe. "I have known him long."

Merry, the blond, laughed.

"The very chap we want to see! Didn't I tell you our luck was still with us? I'll bet he has some decent grub, too. We won't eat cat-leg until we find out."

Swiftly the craft bore down on them, its paddles throwing water into the air at each vigorous stroke, its master balancing easily before the swaying cabin. The crew, loose-shirted, light-skinned, seemed to be mestizos. The paddlers numbered three; a fourth, seated behind the cabin, was steersman. The owner, despite deep tan, was obviously a pure-blooded white; above medium stature, lean, and wiry.

With a loud swash, the crew held their paddles rigid. The blunt-nosed boat lost way. Another swash, and it swung broadside on to the playa; drifted into the shallows, and stopped, aground.

"*Buen 'dia*'," formally greeted the blue-clad man. "Good morning. How are you, Portonio?" His eyes, blue and keen, rested steadily on the strangers.

"*Bien.* Well." Portonio lounged forward. "These señores come to visit you, Loco. They are from North America. We have lost our boat."

With this laconic summary of the entire situation, he glanced at the captain. The latter promptly took up the conversation.

"You are Señor Lucio León? Good! I am Roderick McKay. This is my friend Meredith Knowlton." He nodded toward his blond partner. "And this is Timothy Ryan. We are three fools who have come to explore and allowed two men of San Fernando to steal our boat."

León's eyes twinkled. He answered McKay's Spanish with fluent English.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, gentlemen. Ah, yes, I speak English—I lived for some years in Trinidad. It was in the time of Cipriano Castro."

He paused. The three smiled. They knew that the British island of Trinidad, off the mouth of the Orinoco, was a haven for thousands of Venezuelan political refugees; and the reference to the deposed tyrant Castro made doubly clear the reason for this nonchalant fellow's sojourn there. He laughed lightly and went on.

"Life on an island grows stale after a time, I have found. If by chance you have tired of yours, the ship is waiting. Ah—who were those San Fernando men?"

"Their names were Tito and Mateo," supplied Knowlton.

"Ah. Tito Coro and Mateo Collado, perhaps?" He glanced at Portonio, who nodded. "Ah, yes. I think I understand. Did you hit either of them? I heard you shoot in the night."

"Oh, that wasn't a war," Knowlton explained. "Portonio shot something for breakfast."

He moved aside, giving a view of the stark carcass. León's quick gaze took it in; also the hide and the kettle beside the fire.

"*Válgame Dios!*" he ejaculated. "You shall not eat *that*, friends! I have food, rough fare, but far better than that. But perhaps we had better start the chase at once. We can eat on the way, and then make a better meal when the business is settled. Let us be off. And since you do not need that *tigre* meat, give it to my Indians."

The marooned three, already turning away, turned back, looking quickly at the crew. Portonio kept on moving toward the blankets.

"Indians? These chaps are Indians?" blurted Knowlton.

"Of course. They are almost white, yes—but they are full-blood Indians." Without change of tone, but with slower diction, he spoke in Spanish to his crew. "The strangers have meat of the *tigre*. They go on a blood trail of their enemies. Eat the meat that you may have the strength of the *tigre* for the journey. It is in the pot. We go to kill men of San Fernando."

Into the cool brown eyes of the canoemen came a glow that increased as he spoke. At his final sentence those eyes flamed, and hard grins shot across their faces. With a simultaneous spring they were out and bounding across the playa, shirts flying behind them, strong bare legs sprinting for the prize pot. As one man they pounced on it, hands clutching the unseasoned meat; and with loudly guzzling jaws they gnawed down the wet portions, their eyes still shining with a tigerish gleam.

"Begorry, they're Injuns, all right," asserted Tim. "No pants, no hats, muscles like snakes, yeah, they're hard gorillas, I'll tell the world, even if they do wear nightshirts. And they don't like them San Fernando guys for a cent. Somethin' tells me bad luck is trailin' them two deserters. Wal, le's go."

Portonio was rapidly rolling blankets and ponchos into a compact bundle. Knowlton gathered up the black hide. McKay and Tim picked up the rifles. Meanwhile León, who had been unobtrusively holding a carbine beside his right leg all this time, lowered it and quietly slid it back into the cabin by a push of one *alpargata*-shod foot.

The Indians, having gobbled the contents of the pot almost at one swallow, looked covetously at the big body on the sand. But their master grunted, and they returned slowly to the canoe, carrying with them both pot and tripod. After them flocked the laden whites, Portonio managing to pick his machete from the sand with one finger as he went.

"We'll be a bit crowded, I'm afraid," said Knowlton. "That is, for a while."

"It is nothing," answered their rescuer, speculatively eyeing the rifles of the Northerners. "I am riding light, and there is room in the *carroza*."

By his directions, the Indians stowed the bundles in the rear of the cabin. The four got aboard and crept into the shade of the hood. The crew tugged the craft off the sand, splashed in, and sunk their broad paddles in the water.

"Now let us see the strength of the *tigre*," suggested their commander. A powerful heave of the shoulders answered. The playa slid behind and was gone.

FOR a minute or two, while the passengers settled themselves in their cramped quarters, for the addition of four new men crammed the little place to the limit, there was no more talk. León calmly studied anew the faces of the strangers.

He had taken off his straw sombrero as he crouched within, and the others saw that his hair was a golden brown, thick and wavy; his mustache, cut short but of heavy growth, and his eyebrows were so nearly the color of his bronzed skin as to be almost unnoticed at a little distance. His direct gaze was that of the frontiersman, and, though slightly narrow-lidded from habitual looking into sun-glare, frank and straightforward.

After contemplating the strong features and steely eyes of McKay, the expressive face of Knowlton, and the tenacious visage of Tim, he smiled slightly as if well pleased with his new companions.

"You will pardon me for coming to you a little slowly at first," he said. "It is well, in this Rio Negro country, to look a little carefully. And I am not on good terms with the governor."

"Governor Ramirez? At San Fernando?" queried McKay.

"The same. It is not long since he sent a few men to—ah—remove me. So, as I say, I look a little carefully."

"Cripes! To kill ye?" Tim demanded.

"Quite so. They—were unlucky. But he might send others. The gentleman has a queer idea that if I should die he might enrich himself by working my rubber lands up here. I suppose you met him, and he was very gracious to you? Of course. You are foreign señores, and, no doubt, have letters from high officials. Quite so. But now—how did you happen to pick Tito and Mateo to come with you?"

"Why, we didn't exactly pick them," recalled Knowlton. "In the first place, we got Portonio, here, at Ciudad Bolívar. He was said to be an expert pilot and well acquainted with the upper Orinoco——"

"And he is," put in León. "There are none better."

"Uh-huh. But he said he knew nothing about this Rio Ventuari. So at San Fernando we looked for a couple of men who did know it: one as a pilot, and the other as a handy man. Portonio found several who claimed to know something about it, but all but these two refused to go."

"Ah. And you had mentioned your need to the governor." It was not a question, but a statement.

"Yes."

"And he admired something of yours which you refused to part with."

"He did." All three eyed their new friend intently. "It was the launch. He was very eager to buy it—or, at least, to have us set a price on it."

"Launch?" The Ventuari man looked surprized. "You travel in a launch? And you forced it up into this country? *Caramba!*

"Then, señores, all is plain. The honorable gentleman desired most earnestly to possess your launch. And you refused to consider the idea of parting with it. So he said no more about it, and bade you *adios* with the best of wishes. And meanwhile he saw to it that no men but Tito and Mateo should go with you. And they were good, faithful men—who watched for their chance, and found it last night. Now they are poling their way down the Ventuari as fast as they can, taking the launch and all its goods back to their master, the governor.

"You are left without food or boat, more than a hundred miles from the Orinoco, and a hundred and fifty from San Fernando. If by any chance you live to reach San Fernando again, your launch is safely hidden somewhere beyond the town; Tito and Mateo are not to be found; every one else is dumb; the governor is shocked and desolated by your misfortune. He will see to it that the thieves are hunted to the ends of the earth, and so on.

"After you are gone, in a rotten *curial* kindly loaned by the governor—which probably will sink and drown you before you go very far—Tito and Mateo and the launch reappear, and all the Rio Negro country laughs at the joke. But there is not much chance, señores, that the Ventuari will allow you to return to San Fernando. This river has a way of killing men."

The faces of his auditors hardened. McKay's gray gaze took on a cold glitter. Knowlton's mouth became a thin line. Tim's jaw protruded. Again León laughed lightly.

"You see, I know Governor Ramirez," he added. Then, turning to Portonio, he restated his assertions in Spanish.

The riverman's eyes opened a little wider. After a short interval of consideration he drawled—

"*Sí.*"

"We must be growing simple in our old age," rasped Knowlton. "I sized up Ramirez as a rather smooth proposition and a bit of a grafter, but not so slimy as all that."

McKay made no answer. Tim was not so silent.

"Me, I've got a good mind to go right back to San Fernando—after we git our boat—and take this here, now, Rameery guy apart and see what kind o' works he's got! And I wouldn't put the pieces together again, neither!"

"There are others who feel likewise," rejoined León. "And sooner or later— Well, señores, the last two governors of this Territorio de Amazonas died very suddenly from an overdose of lead. But it is always a little embarrassing for those who give the lead; the federal government is far away and fails to understand the reasons. And since you must go out again through Bolívar where there is a federal garrison——"

"Tim didn't mean exactly that," interrupted Knowlton. "What he'd like to do is to beat up the gentleman. As a matter of fact, it would be considerably more painful to Ramirez than merely being shot; and if Tim turned loose his full repertoire it would take some weeks for the victim's bones to grow together again. However, we'll pass up Ramirez and take it out on Tito and Mateo."

The Ventuari man smiled again, but said no more. All turned their gaze forward, seeking signs of the traitors and their stolen craft. None was visible. The clay banks slid past; turn after turn was rounded; the canoe quivered from the swift throb of its man-power propulsion, beating away with the regularity of tireless machinery. Still the water ahead remained empty of life, varied here and there only by a low playa or a cluster of gray boulders.

On the brows of the Northerners gathered thoughtful frowns. The thieves were making much better progress than had seemed probable. Either they had stolen away early in the night and worked strenuously with poles throughout the moonlit hours, or they had solved the problem of starting the engine. In the latter case the chase by canoe would be well-nigh hopeless, unless the launch should run hard aground. In any event, it was increasingly evident that, but for the lucky arrival of this canoe, the marooned men would have had scant chance of ever overtaking their lost boat.

With only one machete, their progress—hampered by the pathless tangle along shore, the occasional side creeks blocking the way, and the necessity for hunting food—could hardly have measured more than ten miles a day. Ten days, at least, to the Orinoco; fifteen to San Fernando, the only settlement in this whole vast territory.

It would have been a grim, dolorous march, with Death stalking close behind them; with venomous reptile and insect lurking on ground or in bush, with fever and beriberi hovering ready to seize on weakened tissues, with unknown aborigines likely at any time to strike down the staggering little band. No, there was not much chance that they would have survived to confront Governor Ramirez. And to this fate the men Tito and Mateo had abandoned them without a scruple.

Hour after hour snailed away. The voyagers broke their fast on slices of broiled peccary, mutely tendered by their rescuer. The morning breeze died; intense heat settled on the winding water. The paddle-beat slowed; the power of the strokes dwindled. The Indians still were doing their best, but no human frames could forever maintain that terrific labor. Then, suddenly, from the bowman broke an inarticulate croak of triumph.

Another curve had been rounded, and ahead stretched a long straightaway. A couple of hundred yards beyond, hard aground on a shelving playa, lay a heavily listing motorboat. On either side of the stranded craft a man worked doggedly with a stout lever, vainly striving to refloat her.

The long stern chase was done.

CHAPTER III

REPRISAL

THE canoe rocked as the men under the hood attempted to rise and emerge.

"A moment!" cautioned its owner. "Let us make room." Then, to the paddlers: "Into the water!"

With swift precision the three obeyed. Their paddles came inboard and slithered along the carved bottom. They half rose, crouching on tense legs. The bowman grunted. With a simultaneous spring, the pair behind him leaped overboard, one on each side, while the bowman himself shot headlong over his prow.

So accurately timed was the triple dive that the boat neither rolled nor yawed. Three splashes sounded as one. The men were gone, turning under water and swimming to the stern, where the steersman still held his post.

Into the space left vacant crept the three Northerners: McKay taking the extreme bow and lying prone, elbows resting on the flat-topped overhang, rifle-stock cuddling into his shoulder; Knowlton and Tim kneeling behind him, guns at the ready. León, first out, had moved aside enough to let them pass, and now, wordless, watched approvingly their businesslike selection of positions. He himself stood before his cabin entrance, the short but big-bored carbine again dangling negligently beside his leg. Portonio, without a gun, grudgingly remained cooped within.

At a word from León the steersman swung the boat obliquely across the current, giving the three riflemen room to fire freely without hampering one another's movements.

The triple splash had caught the eye or the ear of one of the traitorous San Fernandans. As the cabin yielded up its avengers, he stood motionless a few seconds, with gaze fixed on the canoe. Then, with a yell, he dropped his pole and scrambled monkey-like into the motorboat. His mate, after a second of staring, also flung away his lever and snatched a rifle which the other passed out to him. The first sprang out again, and the pair dropped on their knees in the shallow water.

As the canoe swung into firing position a wicked whine sounded above it. From the playa thumped a blunt report.

"Steady, León! Hold her!" snapped McKay.

A cool, curt command from the Ventuari man. The steersman held the boat motionless. Something sizzled along the water. From the sand came another bang.

With a crash three rifles opened an answering fire. From below retorted a ragged popping. Bullets thudded into the solid gunwales of the dugout. A segment of the palm cabin flew in air. From within sounded a sudden emphatic oath in the tones of Portonio. The guns of the Northerners leaped in a rapid, yet deliberately timed, succession of shots.

León, coolly careless, still stood with rifle unaimed, viewing the combat as unconcernedly as if it were a mere play. Now his sombrero flew off. At that his face contracted, and his carbine snapped to his shoulder. Even as his eye caught the sights, one of the malefactors down ahead slumped forward, struggled an instant, and went limp.

The other sprang up; threw a last bullet at his hunters; turned, and dashed in panic across the sand. Tim's gun cracked. The fugitive staggered. Then León, coolly marking down his man, fired for the first and last time. The San Fernandan took two more stumbling steps and collapsed.

For a moment utter silence held the river. No voice of bird, beast, or man broke the stillness succeeding the gunfire. The canoe drifted onward, the paddlers floating behind the stern, the gunmen lowering their pieces but keenly watching the fallen pair.

Then León spoke briefly. The bow swung again, pointing for the playa. The trailing Indians let go, swam forward a few feet, grasped the gunwale amidships with one hand each, and continued swimming with the other. The steersman began wielding his board blade. Under the combined impetus of paddle and swimmers, the dugout forged ahead at better speed.

"Huh! No wonder we had a long cruise! The engine's runnin'!" Tim discovered.

It was true. From the stern of the motorboat boiled a yellowish wake.

"Got her running and then didn't know enough to shut her off," McKay surmised. "We'll have a job."

No more was said until the canoe grounded beside the beached craft. Then, while Knowlton climbed into the throbbing launch, Tim promised:

"Now I'm goin' to git the goods on Rameery, if there's any words left in these mutts."

The one lying next the boat obviously possessed no words; for he lay with face under water. The second, however, seemed to be still living. Toward him advanced the grim-faced whites and the dripping Indians—the latter carrying machetes which had mysteriously materialized from some shadowy part of the dugout. As they walked, the straining pant of the motor stopped.

The thief sprawling on the hot sand was still breathing. His rifle lay several feet away, but his nearly nerveless fingers held a knife, drawn with his last strength. As the men who had hunted him down stopped beside him, he quivered and his knife-hand moved slightly. McKay promptly stepped on his wrist, stooped, and twisted away the steel.

"Mateo!" he called sharply. "Mateo! Why did you do this?"

The glazing eyes moved a little. The lips, too, moved; but no sound came.

"Hey! Mateo!" roared Tim, bending close. "Who told you to leave us? Rameery?"

Far down in the fading eyes came a glimmer of hate. Through yellow teeth struggled a hoarse whisper. Then something rattled in the dying man's throat. He stiffened—then lay limp.

"No use," grumbled Tim, rising. "He's gone. Ye heard what he said, didn't ye? 'Twas one o' the rottenest cussin's in the Spanish lingo—and that's goin' some. Now was he cussin' us, or cussin' Rameery for gittin' him into this? I dunno."

Nor did any one else know. The putrid invective with which Mateo had died might have been intended either for his slayers or for the governor whose name was the last word to reach his mind.

"Well, that ends that." McKay turned away, throwing aside the captured knife. Instantly the Indians jumped after it. The steersman, nearest to the spot where it dropped, was first to pounce on it, and arose with a gloating grin. The others, moved by a simultaneous thought, dashed back across the playa to loot the body of Tito. To these aborigines a knife was more precious than a diamond.

Portonio, easy-going as ever, ambled over to the fallen rifle—an ancient Winchester of the usual .44 bush type. As he moved away, a big red splotch became noticeable on the back of his shirt.

"Gee cripes! Tonio's wounded!"

"Portonio! What is that wound?" This from León.

"Nada. Nothing." The riverman grinned and picked up the gun. "A bullet came through the *carroza* and burned me. It is nothing.

Critically he examined the repeater, handling it like a man experienced in its use.

"Cool chap," commented McKay, walking onward.

"*Sí*," agreed León. "He has looked death in the eye many times. He was for years a river-captain on the upper Orinoco, bringing out rubber. A very quiet fellow, always calm—and honest. You are very lucky to get such a man."

They reached the boat and stood a minute looking down at Tito, whom the Indians had drawn up from the shallows. León waved a hand outward. His men picked up the body and walked around the boat. A splash sounded. Empty-handed, they returned and trudged over to Mateo. Another short trip, another splash.

"Crocodiles up here?" asked McKay.

"Only the small *babicho*—too small to be useful. But there are plenty of caribes."

The Northerners nodded. They knew the caribe to be the ferocious fish which, traveling in schools, quickly chops a man to bare bones. The faithless Tito and Mateo had disappeared forever from the sight of men.

WITH their passing, the victors turned their whole attention to the boat: A trim, graceful vessel, with speedy lines which even her awkward position could not conceal. The force of her powerful engine had driven her high and dry forward, whereafter the vainly fighting propeller had scooped a deep hole from the slanting sands behind. Now she lay at a badly strained angle, bow high, stern nearly awash, stanchions and double awning tilted far to starboard.

"Think she's damaged, Merry?" asked McKay.

"Not much, Rod, if at all. Strained a bit, of course; but she's got a good sound hull, and she was doing only about eight miles when she hit—unless those fools throttled her down afterward; and that's not likely."

"No, they'd hardly do that. Must have started her accidentally in the first place, monkeying around. Probably didn't even get the power on until an hour or two ago. Then they just hung on and let her rip."

"Wonder how the dumbbells thought they'd git her off o' here with that juice on," snorted Tim. "The more they pried her the higher she climbed. Say, sling out me Englishman toppy, looey. I'm gittin' woozy with this here sun."

Knowlton tossed out a couple of helmets. Tim and McKay donned them, dropping the mosquito-veils behind their necks, but leaving their faces uncovered.

"Ye know, Loco," Tim went on, with easy familiarity, "these here cake-eater hats and veils always make me snicker, but now I've got used to mine I'm scairt to go without it when the sun's goin' strong. Us three guys, now, we bummed round the Amazon a lot, and we never wore nothin' but felt campaign hats. But these ain't so bad—except they always make me feel like I was back in France with me tin dome on."

"Ah! France! You were in the war?"

"Oh, sure. Up to our necks. This hard guy McKay was a cap'n, and pretty-boy Knowlton there was a looey—lieutenant, y'understand—and I was sergeant. And between us we licked the kaiser."

"Ah. I see," smiled the Spaniard. "I have often wondered just what it was that ended the war. My country was not in it, you know, and I was busy here in the far forests, where news is scarce. But now I quite understand."

His glance strayed to the military-looking rifle in the Irishman's fist—identical with those carried by Knowlton and McKay. It was evident that his understanding included the efficiency with which those rifles had just been handled.

At that moment Portonio, carrying the repeater which he had picked from the sand, quietly spoke up.

"This is a good gun, Capitán."

His steady gaze rested on McKay. The latter glanced at him, at the gun, and smiled a little.

"It is yours," he responded. Then, to León: "Your country, like mine, has some fool laws."

"Which only fools obey—unless they must," was the rejoinder. "*Sí*, it now is unlawful for any man in Venezuela to own a rifle or revolver. And what is the result? Honest men like Portonio are disarmed, while snakes like Tito and Mateo have weapons. Every outlaw, every murderer and robber has his gun. So we who live in lawless Rio Negro see to it that we have our guns also—else we do not live long. And those in Caracas who make such laws make us spit at our own government."

"O' course," agreed Tim. "The only kind o' law that's any good is the kind that folks can swaller. Give 'em law that makes 'em sick and they'll spit it right back in yer face. And they'll keep right on spittin' at ye after that, and it's yer own fault for bein' a fool. But speakin' o' law, we'll pass one right here and now, to let Tonio pack a gun and shoot any guy that looks cock-eyed at him. All in favor, aye. There ain't no contrary." Having thus made amends for his recent suspicion of the faithful riverman, he added: "And now le's git this hooker off the beach."

Again the Indians went to work. With their spade-shaped paddles they dug steadily at the sand, forming a watery trough in which the boat could settle to a more even keel. Meanwhile Portonio shifted the cargo—boxes of food, rolls of dunnage, cans of fuel—into the extreme stern. At length the vessel lay at an easy angle, nearly afloat.

Then the paddles were cast aside, and all except Knowlton gathered at the bow. Within, the lieutenant tested the controls, giving the propeller a few preliminary revolutons at idling speed. All the machinery responded. So did the Indians.

At the first lifelike purr and quiver they leaped backward. It was not until their Spanish commander berated them, and then leaned against the sharp cutwater to prove its harmlessness, that the aborigines would return to close quarters with the devil-craft.

"All set?" queried Knowlton. "Snap into it! Heave-o! Heave!"

The eight heaved, lifting as they pushed. The engine, running in reverse, tugged the hull backward. Grinding on the sands, she dragged herself slowly outward — then jumped away. Her liberators tumbled in a heap. When they arose, the boat was idling in deep water.

"Nothing hurt. She runs like a clock," exulted the driver. "Tumble in, fellows, and we'll go somewhere else and have a regular feed. By the way, Señor León, where were you heading for?"

"For my *sitio*, a long distance up the river. I have just been visiting some Indians on the Rio Parú, and am on my way home. If you had traveled another half-mile yesterday you would have caught up with me, for I camped above the bend beyond your playa. Perhaps now we had best go downstream a little more and eat."

He glanced along the river, which, to the eyes of the Northerners, showed no distinguishing marks at this point, but which he evidently knew well; for he added:

"The Caño Camani is not far down, and at its mouth is a good camping spot. If you do not mind losing a little more distance——"

"Sure. Pile in."

The dugout filled again. Its paddlers, with a few strokes, sent it across the intervening water, and its master swung himself into the powerboat, followed by McKay, Tim, and Portonio. But the Indians refused to enter the infernal craft which moved without paddle or pole; and this time León did not urge them. The piassava rope of the canoe was hitched astern, and as the launch forged ahead the round-barreled river-beast began to swim after, her crew squatting low and tensely clutching the thick gunwales.

With a gentle swish of divided waters, the strangely mated pair of small craft—one gliding gracefully with her aristocratic nose in air, the other wallowing in uncouth ugliness—slid down the heat-hazed stream. Rapidly they diminished into the straight vista below, veered around a bend, and were gone.

CHAPTER IV

THE LEGEND

IN A thinly wooded glade at the junction of the river and a slow-flowing creek, two small groups of men squatted on opposite sides of a dying fire. On the one hand, men of Saxon and Spanish blood talked and smoked in easy comradeship. On the other, motionless Indians waited. At the shore a pair of boats also waited. Whether all should travel again together, or go their separate ways, depended on the outcome of the present conference.

"We're up here for a foolish reason," Knowlton was saying. "That is, if you call it foolish to do something just for the sport of it. We three fellows are the kind who have to cut loose from civilization once in a while and see if we can find something new. Call us adventurers, if you like, or vagabonds, or just plain fools."

"Or, perhaps, loco," put in Loco León, a twinkle in his eye.

Smiles and a short silence met his reference to his own sobriquet. Then Knowlton went on as if he had not spoken.

"Anyhow, we get restless. We've knocked around quite a bit on the upper Amazon, as Tim said a while ago, and had about enough of it. We've traveled into other parts of the world, of course, but been rather bored by them. South America seems to be the one region that calls us back. So here we are, back in South America. And the reason why we're on your river at present is this:

"A while ago Rod, here, ran across a legend that down in this region there's a 'lost white race;' a bunch of people with white skins, blue eyes, yellow hair; regular blonds, like you and me. It seems that this story is two or three hundred years old, but nobody has ever found out whether it's fact or fiction. On the face of it, it's a rather improbable tale, of course; but we three fellows have been around enough to know that a story may be absolutely true even if all the wise boys say it's poppycock. And—well, here we are, taking a look around."

León inhaled a lungful of cigaret smoke and slowly breathed it out.

"I see," he said. "Your legend said those blond people were on this Ventuari?"

"Well, no. We didn't hear of the Ventuari until recently. The story was very vague, but indicated that the blonds were in the mountains a little north of the Orinoco, near its head. So we got all the information we could about the Orinoco, but still we didn't know much.

"Then we decided to travel up the Orinoco and see whatever we could. Brought along this speed-boat for fast travel—we didn't realize just how rocky the big river was. If we hadn't been lucky enough to get hold of Portonio at Ciudad Bolívar we probably would have wrecked ourselves in the rapids higher up."

"You would." León nodded emphatically. "Those *raudales* kill even experienced rivermen. San Borje, Caribén—all the rest—are death-holes. And Atures and Maipures—how did you ever get so heavy a boat around those long stretches? The bullock carts there could never carry it."

"Oh, yes, they did. We had to take her apart, though; engine had to come out. It was a tough job to take her down and reassemble twice. But we made out all right. However, I'm getting ahead of my story. At Bolívar we asked a lot of questions about this 'white race' up here, and nobody knew anything about them. Finally one chap mentioned you. He said you could tell us about them if anybody could. So we kept you in mind——"

"If you please, I should like to know just what words were used about me. And by whom."

Again the Northerners looked quizzically at him. Suppressed smiles twitched the corners of all three mouths. Through those habitually half-closed lids the blond Spaniard watched them. Then Knowlton chuckled.

"Well, if you will have it, old chap, the words were about like this: 'Find Loco León, who trades in balata rubber in the Rio Negro country. He can tell you of more wonders than are in all the earth.' As to just who said it, I'm not certain. There were several present at the time."

"Ah, yes. And when it was said, all laughed."

"Well, yes, they did."

León smiled again, nonchalant as ever, and flipped his cigaret stub into the smouldering fire.

"And then?"

"Well, then we asked where to find you, and somebody answered: 'In the wilds of Guayana, or the jungles of the Alto Orinoco, or wherever else the Mad Lion chooses to walk. The Rio Ventuari is his home—when he is there.' We got a bit sore then—thought they were kidding us with riddles. But later on Portonio told us that what those chaps had said was literally true.

"Then at San Fernando we asked more questions. Rubbermen and others were positive that no blond Indians were on or near the Orinoco, but some said they'd heard of such people away up in the Guayana mountains—where this Ventuari comes from. So, as I said before, here we are."

"I see." The Ventuari man tilted his peaked sombrero a bit and reflectively rubbed an ear. "And what do you know about this Ventuari?"

"Nothing, except that it's said to be very rough in the upper part."

"*Sí.* Rough indeed. As for these lost white people, señor—what gave you faith that such people exist?"

"Meaning that they don't exist?" McKay thrust in.

The Spaniard smiled, his expression unreadable.

"I have not said so, my friend," he countered. "Perhaps they do, perhaps not, *quièn sabe* I merely asked a question."

McKay's eyes narrowed a trifle. The other seemed playing with them. But Knowlton answered the question.

"I wouldn't exactly say that we had great faith in that legend. As I've said before, we were restless; wanted to go somewhere; and this was a good excuse to come here. At the same time, such a thing may be possible. For instance, it's a pretty well accepted fact that North America was visited—long before Columbus' time—by the Norsemen; there are even indications that they made settlements there. They disappeared.

"It also may be possible that the Norsemen, or some other blond people, reached South America, and haven't disappeared. If they coasted down North America and then followed the line of the Indies, they'd hit South America near the Orinoco mouth.

"Then, for some reason or other, they might get up into the Guayana highlands and, through force of circumstances, remain there. Nobody knows to the contrary. In fact, so far as we can learn, nobody knows anything about what's in this Guayana territory—a fine large piece of land full of forests and mountains and rivers, practically all of it unexplored. In such a place almost anything's possible!"

His voice took on a tinge of enthusiasm as he talked, and under his silky lashes grew the fire of the dreamer, forever looking beyond the far horizon for mystic lands; the flame which, centuries before, must have glowed in the souls of Drake, of Raleigh, of many another adventurer who journeyed over the rim of the known world to seek the unknown—and which still burns, inextinguishable, in the heart of many an unsung rover today.

And under the drooping lids of Loco León, watching him, suddenly kindled an answering spark. Hitherto he had been weighing these newcomers, building up his judgment of them through word and act, through movement and expression. Now, as he glimpsed the inner spirit of the other blond and caught its reflection under the brows of his red- and black-crowned mates, he ceased to probe; for now he knew them.

But of this he gave no sign. Coolly he drew out a roll of *tabarí* bark and stripped from it a thin sheet; produced a small rubber pouch and dropped shreds of black tobacco from it to the bark; rolled the cigaret, licked it, lighted it, and drew a long puff.

"TRUE," he said then. "In this Guayana almost anything is possible. I myself have seen strange things here. How many other strange things there may be—things which I, living here for years, have neither seen nor heard—I cannot guess. It is an amazing land; a land of mystery, of secrets which no man born outside its hills can comprehend—yes, of things which even its own sons do not understand."

He paused, his glance straying to the four aborigines. Although they could not hope to understand the outlandish language with which he talked to the foreigners, they were listening intently to his voice, watching him with unwinking attention; four sphinxes, betraying no thought of their own, but seeking to absorb his.

"There," he continued, nodding toward them, "is Guayana. These men are born of Guayana. I have known them, and their nation has known me, for years; they are my most trusted men, and I am the only white man in the world who is trusted by their race. They will work for me, fight for me, even die for me, because they know and trust me so well. Yet they will not tell me the secrets of their nation. In all the years I have known them, they have never even told me their names!

"They have given me names, yes—but they are Spanish names, every one; not their real names. You will find it so with all the Indians you meet here. Few of the Indians of this Ventuari can speak Spanish; but if by chance they meet a white man, every one of them has a Spanish name to give—the few who do know Spanish give names to all the rest.

"These men are of the Maquiritare nation. All this Ventuari country, and the country of the Rio Caura to the eastward, is the land of the Maquiritares. All Maquiritares are my friends. But when I go about in their land, there are some places where even I cannot go. The Maquiritares—these men squatting here, who will do almost anything for me—will not go into those places with me. Neither will they let me go there alone.

"If I try, accidents happen; my canoe disappears, my food vanishes, or I fall sick. As soon as I turn back, the canoe is found again, new food appears, my sickness leaves me. And I never learn why I must not go into those spots. My men will not tell me what is there. They are utterly dumb.

"That is Guayana. It holds its secrets well. To us white men—to us who are not of Guayana blood—it will not give those secrets. And I know that even to its own sons it does not tell all. By living among these people I have picked up a little of their language—not much, for it is a very queer tongue, but enough to understand them at times; and I have never let them know that I did understand it.

"So I have heard them talk to one another, and sometimes their talk has shown that there are weird things which they cannot grasp; things dreadful, mysterious, inhuman—I do not know what to call them—in some parts of this country. Yes, señores, Guayana is——"

Abruptly he halted, searching the faces

of his auditors. Then he gave a short, hard laugh.

"But these are the ravings of Loco León, the Crazy Lion, who 'can tell you of more marvels than are in all the earth'! So I shall say no more."

The three frowned.

"Oh, say, old chap, that's not fair," protested Knowlton. "What do we care for what those Bolívar wise-guys said? What we want to know is——"

"Pardon," broke in León. "What you want to know is the truth. *Bien.* The way to know the truth is to see it with your own eyes. I may tell you the truth, but unless you can look on that truth you may not believe it. Go yourselves and see what you may. Whatever help I can give you is yours at command."

"Thanks," acknowledged McKay. "You've already helped us out of a rather bad hole, and we're mighty grateful. If you could get us a good Indian or two, and give us a little map of the upper river——"

"If you wish, I will go with you myself."

"Fine! We certainly do wish it."

"*Bien.*" León nodded carelessly. "I am idle at present—there is nothing to do until the next wet season approaches and my workers begin to gather. So——"

"Say, listen, Loco," begged Tim. "Loosen up about them blondies, now. Are they real or jest a yarn?"

"You shall see," was the noncommittal answer. "Do you know, Señor Ryan, why I am called Loco León? Because I have told tales of this land to men who have not seen what I have seen. They made a joke of my tales, of my name—changing my real name of Lucio to Loco. For the laughter of those town dwelling fools I care no more than for the braying of burros. Yet you men heard that laughter before you met me, and I have seen that it is still alive in your minds. And since you are here and may see for yourselves what is truth, I shall tell no tales to you."

He smiled again, but his tone was final. The three probed his face a moment. Knowlton shrugged.

"So be it," he acquiesced. "By the way, are these Indians up above likely to resent our invasion of their country? We're strangers."

"I do not know," the Spaniard admitted. "Those on the Ventuari itself will make no trouble, since they will see that you are my friends. But of those on the side *rios* and *caños* I am not so sure. Some of them are very wild. And you must understand, señores, that this country is closed to white men."

"Oho!" All three sat up a little straighter. "How's that?"

"Many years ago—perhaps a hundred, perhaps two hundred—soldiers and Jesuit priests came up the Caura. They made forts and tried to 'civilize' the Indians. The Indians endured them for a time. Then, in one night, they destroyed forts, soldiers, everything. And since that time no men from outside have been allowed to stay in the Guayana mountains—except myself."

"Hm! Sounds interesting," commented McKay. "But we don't want to fight these chaps."

"Nor do I want you to fight them. That is one reason why I go with you," was the candid response. "The Maquiritares are my best friends. I want no harm to come to them, or to you. They are good people when one knows them, but—they are descendants of the old Caribs; and, as you may know, when the Caribs entered a fight it was to the death."

Tim nodded sagely, again glancing at the four sphinxes.

"I knowed these gorillas was hard-boiled," he asserted. "Missus Ryan's li'l boy ain't goin' to start nothin' with 'em, I'll tell the cock-eyed world."

León laughed and arose. The others, too, stood up, the Indians rising as if moved by a single spring. Portonio gathered up the metal dishes from which he and his companions had eaten provisions far more succulent than had seemed likely that morning. By tacit consent, all moved to the boats.

A brief bustle of embarkation, a gentle throbbing, a subdued swash—and once more the creek mouth was empty. The council fire became a mere patch of ash. Its work was done, its glow departed. Yet it was not dead; for its ruddy warmth had entered now into the red blood of men, welding those who had been strangers into a steel-strong band. And that flame was to burn on, sometimes flaring, sometimes flickering, but never failing, through many a weird hour to come.

CHAPTER V

A STONE IN THE POOL

ANOTHER afternoon sun hurled its javelins of heat down on the winding Rio Ventuari. Through its glare glided the incongruously mated pair of boats.

At the driver's wheel sat Knowlton, peering steadily ahead through amber goggles, responding at once to the occasional directions of Loco León, who lounged beside him. Lolling in folding chairs behind driver and pilot, McKay and Tim sleepily watched the passing shores.

Still farther aft, draping his length over the cargo as loosely as a mere huddle of clothes, Portonio indulged in the South American's inalienable right of drowsing when other occupation lacked. And at the end of the tow-rope the Indians, their awe of the devil-boat now somewhat abated, loafed luxuriously in their master's cabin, enjoying to the full the miraculous experience of traveling upstream without work.

As ever, the shores were empty of human life—or, at least, appeared so. If any spying eyes peeped from the dense greenery on either hand, their owners kept themselves hidden. Nowhere in the verdant wall was any man-made opening, any palm hut; nowhere beside the banks—no longer vertical and naked, but sloping and bushy—lay any canoe. Yet, from time to time, appeared indisputable evidence that men were not far away, or had been here and gone. At the mouth of some narrow *caño* occasionally showed a tripodic frame, resembling the bare poles of a teepee, enclosing a grate on which had been roasted big game; or a few palm fronds, leaning aslant from a patch of sand like great feathers, betokened the recent presence of men who had slept a night beneath those frail dew-shelters. Sometimes on a playa, too, appeared charred fagots and the massive bones of a slaughtered tapir.

"Indios," explained León. "They live up these *caños*—many days away, perhaps—and now in the dry time they come down to hunt and fish a few days, then go away again."

"Maquiritares?" inquired McKay.

"No. Other peoples. Macos or Yavaranos, Curacichanos or wandering Piaroas. There are several small nations—not all of whom are my friends, so I have nothing to do with them. The Maquiritares are highlanders, and live always in the forests. This country along here is more low and open; there are many *sabanas*, with forests along all the streams, and great hills which stand alone, shooting up and standing like blocks. A queer land, with queer unknown peoples in it."

His mouth closed tightly again, as if to hold back any further information regarding those mysterious dwellers in a mysterious land. The Northerners, asking no further questions, covertly studied him once more.

In a way, he was something of a mystery himself—at least, to his own countrymen; a man who, though possessing considerable wealth derived from his balata business, chose to pass his life in the wilds rather than in a town. This in itself was so incomprehensible to the townsmen of Ciudad Bolívar, the metropolis of the Orinoco region, that it was one of the reasons why they called him "Loco."

To their minds there could be but two logical reasons for a man to live in this dangerous hinterland: that he was so keen to make money from the rubber trade that he was willing to gamble his life, or that he found it unhealthy to reside within reach of federal magistrates.

To León neither of these reasons applied; for he was known to have no great regard for money, though he brought out the best cargoes known in the entire region, and, since the ousting of the Castro régime and the assumption of power by Gomez, he had nothing to fear from the government.

Yet, though he was a mystery to Bolívar, it had been quite apparent that he was well liked there. At San Fernando de Atabapo, on the contrary, it had been fully as obvious that the reverse was true. There, though little had been said of him, the mention of his name had brought sinister looks into the eyes of men. In view of the unsavory reputation of that town, however, and the recent charges of León himself against its highest official, its enmity might be considered almost a compliment to his own character.

The voyagers had already heard that San Fernando had long borne an evil name; that recently it had been the headquarters of an army of outlaws; that the rubber traders and rubber workers now composing the bulk of its population habitually enslaved and maltreated Indians in order to get out their balata crops. With the denizens of such a town Loco León, honest man and friend of aborigines, would hardly be popular.

The scrutiny and speculation of the Northerners now was not prompted either by distrust of this self-reliant rover or by failure to understand him. Adventurers themselves, lovers of the wild places, they felt that here was a kindred spirit; that the spell of the wilderness held him in thrall, and that he could no more remain cooped in a town than could the restless león, puma, whose name he bore. And, though he refused the information they asked and was leading them into unknown dangers, they harbored no suspicion of his motives.

What they most wished to know about him was the nature of his experiences in this land where, as he himself admitted, almost anything was possible. But to question him further would be worse than useless. The set of his jaw made that fact plain.

So they rushed on, covering hourly a distance which, in a pole-propelled dugout, would have cost at least half a day of steady toil. Sunset was at hand when their pilot gave the word to slow down and prepare to land. As the flow of power diminished and the up-tilted bow sank slowly to the surface, a dry creek-mouth became visible ahead, at the right.

"There," pointed León, "is the Cañon Negro. On it is my *sitio*."

THAT the designated spot showed no sign of life. Only the steep-walled gap yawned, like other dried-up *caños* seen at intervals farther down. Yet, as soon as the boats stopped at the opening, men appeared as if from nowhere: Indians who emerged from thick brush, grinned at their patron, and stared at the strange craft and the strange white men.

"This, señores, is the end of the road for your gas-boat," he went on. "A little way above here are the cataracts, which no boat can pass, by water or by land. Tomorrow we shall have your equipment shifted to canoes. Now let us see what we may find here."

With that he mounted a slope at one side of the ravine and led the way inland. Leaving Portonio to direct the transportation of the personal kits, the Northerners followed. Along a narrow foot-track they passed, and across a flimsy bridge spanning the waterless water-course, and so to the domicile of their new partner. And there, as the sun plunged below the horizon and swift night overspread the land, they made themselves at home.

The wilderness estate of the rover comprised a small clearing, a half-dozen palm huts, and a plantation. The houses stood only a hundred yards from the river, but were as invisible from the stream as if they had been miles farther back; for between them and the Ventuari rose a tall curtain of trees and brush, pierced only by the creek-bed and the footpath.

The plantation, farther back, was likewise concealed by a screen of verdure which seemed mere useless jungle. Like his Indian friends, Loco León dwelt in semi-seclusion, leaving at the main stream no advertisement of his whereabouts. And, like them, he made his habitation extremely simple.

To the Americans, who had expected a substantial adobe house, it came as a bit of a surprize to find their host's quarters no better than those of an Orinoco peon: A windowless, flimsy thatch structure, with walls and roof both of palm-fronds, and only one opening, high up at the peak, for ventilation and light. In lieu of doors, burlap curtains hung in the front and rear portals as partial protection against the swarming day mosquitoes.

Within, a crude table and a couple of chairs, with a hammock, comprised virtually all the furnishings. The only provision for a night light was a common kerosene lantern dangling on a palm-fiber cord above the table.

Externally, four of the other five huts were identical with that of the master, the walls protecting their Indian tenants from the insect plague. The odd one was without walls; an open-sided shed, wherein stood a mud fireplace—useful for baking cassava or roasting game—and a couple of pole tables on which various kinds of work could be performed unhindered by rain. In all, the place was a camp, rather than a home; a permanent and absolutely masculine camp. In it was no woman—not even a cook.

The cooking tonight was done by Portonio, who, at a small clay stove at the rear, concocted an excellent meal for his señores. When it was eaten he withdrew, carrying his rifle to the power-boat, there to sleep as night guard. The others lounged in their hammocks, slung in horse-shoe formation from the pole rafters. Save for the feeble illumination from the lantern, the room was swathed in shadow. Outside, the gloom preceding moonrise lay thick.

"A rude, rough place," León deprecated, glancing about him, "but one which satisfies all my needs. If enemies come and destroy it in my absence—a thing which has happened more than once—they have burned only a few palm *perreras*, dog-houses, which my men can rebuild in a few days."

"But how about your goods?" inquired Knowlton. "You must have quite a bit of trade-stuff for the Indians when the balata season is on."

"Oh, yes. Worth as much as ten thousand bolívares, sometimes. But you may be sure that I take good care of that. At a little distance from here, in three different houses hidden in thick bush and known only to my trusted men, I keep all those things. And I keep them under watch at all times.

"A few of my boys live in a small guardhouse there, and any stranger who might blunder into that spot would not be likely to blunder out again. What is more, I keep here no Indian who has a woman. There is no such thing as keeping a secret when a woman has a way of learning it."

"So you don't trust all Maquiritares," suggested McKay.

"I trust few men—white, black, or brown—and no women. Indians are human; some among them will lie and steal, just as among us whites. Why not? Should we, the noble white race, who kill and rob and cheat one another, expect the simple Indian to be better than ourselves? That is not sense. Yet the Maquiritare is usually far more honest than most of the civilized people who live outside this region. It is against the few who are not honest that I keep watch; and against those other Indians who are not Maquiritares and not my friends; and most of all, against thieves and killers from San Fernando."

"But a woman wouldn't have much chance to tell tales here, would she?" quizzed Knowlton. "You can't have many visitors in this place."

"More than you would think, señor. Indians come and go. Let the father or brother of a woman living here come to visit, and she would tell him all she knew. No woman can keep her mouth shut. And the wilderness has many ears, my friends. Yes, in this empty land, where there seem none to hear, a carelessly spoken word may travel league after league—up the river, along the *caños*, across the *sabana*, over the mountains—and die only after it has gone north and south and east and west for hundreds of miles. It is like a little stone dropped into a quiet pool. It sinks and is at once forgotten by the one who dropped it there; but the ripples of that stone go on and on until they reach the shore."

THERE was a silent pause. Then the talk turned to the affairs of the outer world, and the little homily on the danger of loose tongues was forgotten. Tales of the war began to flow. Tim had just completed a somewhat indecorous, but highly diverting, anecdote of his days in France, when León's gaze darted to the doorway. Outside had sounded a grunting remark and reply.

"Who is there?" demanded the master of the estate.

The burlap moved aside. In came a head, squinting toward the hammocks. A voice replied:

"Frasco. Men from Caño Tamara are here. One speaks for all."

"*Bien*. Bring him in." To his companions León added: "The Caño Tamara is up in the hills, and its people rather wild."

The man following the shirted Frasco bore out his words. Totally unclothed, save for a clout so tiny as to be scarcely a covering; ear-lobes thrust through with short sections of cane; hair hanging to his eyes, which glinted warily at the lounging conclave; body inclined slightly forward, step stealthy and tense as that of a stalking jaguar—this fellow was instinct with the spirit of the wilds.

"I have never seen this man before," quietly said León. "He is from far back." Then, in Spanish, to Frasco: "He brings no message?"

"No. He and three more travel about. Pepe met them in the *sabana*. They stay here tonight. They hear three strangers are here. They will not sleep until you tell this one it is well."

"*Bien*. I will talk with him and calm his mind. He speaks no Spanish?"

"A little. He can understand."

"It is good." Aside, in English, he remarked: "This is one more of the many oddities of this land: An Indian who, I am sure, has never before met white men, yet who knows the white men's tongue. No doubt he has learned it from some Spanish-speaking Maquiritare." Addressing the newcomer, he declared: "All is well. These men are of good heart and from a land far away. Speak now the news of the Caño Tamara to Loco León."

The Tamara man made no answer. In his attitude, however, a slight change was noticeable—a subtle relaxation from his wary tension, as the calm voice reassured him. For a moment he keenly surveyed every face before him. Then his gaze returned to León.

"I have asked him too a big question," said the latter, "in asking for all news. It will take many small questions and answers to bring it out. If it wearies you, I will send him out and talk further in the morning."

"No. Go ahead," said McKay.

Deliberately León began, making inconsequential inquiries. The visitor replied, at first curtly, then with a little more detail, though always slowly and haltingly, as his command of the Spanish language was decidedly limited. Before long the others lost all interest in the trivial conversation and let their thoughts go roving to other matters. McKay and Knowlton yawned. Tim, on the other hand, grew restless.

Saying nothing, he arose and sauntered doorward; drew aside the burlap, looked out, and found the clearing lighted by the moon, which now was rolling up from behind the trees. He stepped through the portal and stood a minute contemplating the clear sky and the shadow-streaked earth. Then, walking aimlessly, he strolled away among the other huts.

As he approached the open shed, figures suddenly materialized beside the mud furnace; forms of men who, hitherto squatting almost invisible in the shadow, had abruptly started up. Tim halted short. Then, noting that two of the five wore shirts, he resumed his easy stride. In a minute or two he paused again beside a corner-post, grinning at the silent quintet.

"Hullo," he greeted. Getting no answer, he repeated in Spanish: "*Buen' noche'*."

A grunt answered.

"Tamara?" he pursued, nodding toward the three unclothed men.

"*Sí*," answered one of León's retainers. "These are of Tamara."

"Uh-huh. Speak Spanish?"

"One does. A little."

"*Bueno*. You can sleep without fear, *amigos*. We are friends. Your comrade now gives news to Loco. All is well."

One of the three rovers, all of whom, Tim now perceived, grasped spears or bows, slowly assumed an easier position. The other two, not understanding, maintained their suspicious readiness until a shirted Maquiritare said something in monotone. Then they also stood more loosely. With another grin, Tim strolled onward.

After a few steps, however, he slowed, his lids narrowing shrewdly. Over his shoulder he asked in a casual tone:

"How many days to the place of the *blancos puros*—the pure whites—the *blondos?*"

"Twenty days," replied a voice.

Tim's eyes glistened. A chuckle of exultation rose to his throat, but he swallowed it. In the same casual tone he remarked:

"Good. Then we shall be there before another full moon."

No answer. He walked on, inwardly rejoicing, and swung around in an apparently unchosen circle, heading back to the house. He did not observe that the five aborigines had looked at one another with widening stares, nor pay any attention to the fact that they now were talking in low but excited tones.

As he reentered the house, León glanced at him, then at his drowsy partners. With a short smile, he arose and ended the uninteresting talk. The Indians filed out. León himself walked as far as the door, where he stood a minute with head outside, looking over his peaceful domain. Tim snatched his opportunity.

"Hey, fellers!" he whispered. "I got the low-down about them blondies. They're real! I jest asked an Injun, sort of off-hand, how far it was to the *blanco puro* country, and he says twenty days."

A quick look and a swift grin passed between Knowlton and McKay. Neither spoke. When León returned he found all three, with face expressionless, undressing preparatory to donning pajamas.

Presently the light was blown out, and within the house sounded only the breathing of five resting men. Outside, in the open shed, four more men—the naked rovers from the Tamara—hung their hammocks and lay down in them. The pair of Maquiritares who had kept them company withdrew to another hut, muttering as if something troubled them. In all the clearing of the Caño Negro moved no human figure. It was the time for sleep.

But, after a time, those four men reclining in the shed sat up again. They looked and listened; put their heads together; talked in short whispers. Then spoke the oldest, in a low tone of decision:

"The time has come. Loco León has walked our ways alone. It was well. Now he brings strange whites. It is not well. The word must go to the Talking Mountain. It must go fast. It must go now."

Swiftly, silently, they took down the light cotton nets, wadded them tight, slung them on their shoulders; picked up spears, arrows, bows; crept out into the moonlight; filed away toward the dark forest, beyond which lay the open, rolling savanna; and were gone, noiseless as flitting ghosts.

Into the vast pool of mystery which men call Guayana had dropped a tiny stone; a few careless words spoken by a flame-haired stranger. And now, unseen and unsuspected, the ripple was stealing away across the silences, creeping steadily and surely into the shadowy unknown.

CHAPTER VI

A SNAKE IN THE TRAIL

THUNDERING over a precipice, the river Ventuari plunged in white fury down a long boulder-bordered chute between steep jungled hills. Then it smoothed out and flowed in a sweeping curve away around a bend. Beyond that turn it hissed resentfully as it encountered the blunt bows of two dugout canoes forging doggedly upward against its strength. Finding its resistance futile, it slid away behind them and let them go their way.

Within those two slow-moving craft traveled fourteen men, all light of skin. Ten of these were at work: Eight long-shirted Indians wielding lengthy but light poles, with occasional shifts to paddles; the other two holding the honored position of steersman. The pilot of the first boat was an Indian; of the second, Portonio. The remaining four were McKay and Knowlton, Tim and León, paired in separate canoes, and lounging against cargoes of equal size covered by tarpaulins. Over them arched no cabins. Until they returned down the river they would not again see such comforts.

The speed-boat, which recently had kicked the leagues behind it with such contemptuous ease, now had vanished from the waterway. Up a narrow, deep, twisting and almost invisible *caño* it lay hidden, half a mile above the settlement of León; and there, moored by a long *chiquechique* rope which would allow it to rise or fall with any change of water-level, it would await the return of its masters from the fierce waters where it could not go. Within it, protected by a snugly tied canvas cover from rain and any prowling creatures, remained all superfluous equipment.

Now their outfits consisted only of personal kits; a couple of army locker trunks containing photographic, medical, and similar supplies; food and matches, arms and ammunition. Since Loco León had volunteered his services and those of his men, all other articles had become unnecessary; and even these might, at least in part, be cached at some point higher up. It was a foregone conclusion that the upland of Guayana was no place for the transportation of excess baggage.

León himself carried only a change of clothing, a machete, a hammock, a lantern, some smoked peccary and cassava, his rifle, and a goodly supply of .44 cartridges. Of these blunt bullets he seemed to have a plentiful store despite the rigid laws of Venezuela, and to Portonio he had given a couple of boxes as casually as if merely tendering a cigaret. That stalwart river-man now sat with his new-found San Fernando gun between his feet, where he could glance down at it occasionally in quiet joy of possession.

As for the other rifle—the one taken from dead Tito by the Indians—that was now reposing in one of León's secret houses at Caño Negro. He had coolly taken it from the Maquiritare who first seized it, and that man had made no protest.

For some reason of his own, the master of the Ventuari did not allow his retainers to possess rifles. The only weapons which they now brought with them were machetes, stiff brazilwood bows, five-foot cane arrows tipped with steel, and a long Maquiritare gun—this firearm being a single-barreled muzzle-loading shotgun of small gage, useful only for killing birds at short range.

Steadily the two hollow logs breasted the current, crawling upward foot by foot as the polers swung and pushed and stooped with rhythmic sway. Around the curve they swam—and the listless passengers sat up straight, peering at the white water beyond. The newcomers still were watching its savage rush when their canoes grounded at a sandy shore and León arose.

"The first of several little obstacles which you will meet," he remarked, with a wave of the hand. "The cataract of Equencua. We now must take to the broad highway and walk."

Tim scowled at the dense tangle of timber blockading both the shores above, while the other watched him quizzically.

"Yeah," he grunted. "I've traveled them broad highways before now. If they're real broad they're most a foot wide; otherways, about four inches. We ain't tenderfeet, Loco—not after muckin' round in the swamps over east o' the Andes. We've walked where there wasn't nothin' to walk on half the time. Let us git toenail onto that road o' yourn, and ye can't lose us."

The rover nodded, looking well pleased by the red man's sturdy self-reliance, and stepped out on the sand. All the others debarked, and the Indians began removing cargo.

"What did you call this place?" asked Knowlton.

"Equencua. An Indian name. The Indians of our country, as you perhaps know, make their manioc, or cassava, from poisonous roots which are grated and then squeezed in a long narrow basket, pressing out most of the poison. That basket is called 'equencua.' So, because the hills here narrow and squeeze the river together to drop over that cataract, the Indians have named the place Equencua, or Squeezer."

"Hm! And yet some folks say Indians have no imagination."

"I know. It only shows that they do not know the Indian. But let us go, friends. We have spent much of the day in reaching here, and we had best move on to the upper port. I have there a shed where we can sleep."

The Indians, without orders, were already dividing among themselves the articles to be portaged, which they laid in cylindrical pack-baskets with broad bark tumplines—all except the two most muscular fellows, who were to transport the twin trunks on their heads. The Americans slung on their shoulders small but heavy-laden rucksacks—containing, among other things, rolled-up web belts with holstered pistols attached thereto—and followed their leader.

Portonio, his rifle snuggled in the crook of an arm, loitered behind, keeping a watchful eye on the Maquiritares to make sure that nothing was overlooked or neglected. Tim, glancing back, chuckled.

"Hey, looey, lookit Tonio," he prompted. "Notice how him and that gun are glued together! Git the way he stands, and the way his hat's canted over one eye—much as to say: 'I'll tell the cock-eyed world any gorilla that wants trouble can come and git it!' The lad can handle himself, I bet."

The others looked, smiled, and plodded on. With the acquisition of that rifle the stalwart riverman had, indeed, taken on a new air of self-reliance; an assurance wholly devoid of arrogance, yet tinged with that cool confidence marking the natural gunman when armed. Heretofore only a quiet subordinate, now he was virtually a comrade in arms.

While the leaders trudged away across an apparently pathless jumble of rocks, sand, and driftwood, he remained until the canoes were securely tied up and the pack-baskets and trunks hoisted into place. Then, as the Indians lined out toward the cataract, he trailed in the rear, gun swinging loosely in one brawny fist, eyes roving in casual but all-seeing surveys of ground and trees, after the fashion of a veteran wilderness traveler.

BEFORE long the loosely joined column had entered a foot-wide path which squirmed along the slope among thick timber. At once the air cooled, and the mosquitoes magically vanished. With the disappearance of the stinging pests the Indians halted, unslung packs, stripped off their shirts, wadded them up as head-cushions; took up their burdens again, and resumed their progress. Attired now in nothing but small red clouts, carrying their jungle weapons with habitual readiness, planting their ground gripping feet in true jungle style—one foot directly before the other in a straight line, instead of with the slight right-and-left irregularity characteristic of dwellers in more open lands—they were metamorphosed as subtly as Portonio; changed from semi-civilized boatmen to noiseless creatures of the tropic forest. Tim chuckled again as he viewed them.

"Begorry, this feels like ol' times," he asserted. "Marchin' along in the bush, not knowin' jest where we're goin' and not givin' more'n half a dang, with a gang of Injuns trailin' us. Boats are *bokoo* jolly and all that, but they ain't like the ol' shanks' mare. Hep! Hep! Git-that-step! Here comes the Yanks!".

And with that he lifted up a raucous voice that dominated the tree-muffled roar of the cataract in a burst of song.

"We're the infantree, the infantree,
With the dirt behind our ears!
The infantree, the infantree,
That laps up all the beers!
The cavalry and artillery
And the bloomin' engineers—
Say, they couldn't lick the infantry
In a hundred thousand years!"

As that stentorian howl tore through the rumble of the waters, Loco León and his Indians stopped dead; the Venturi man squinting back, the Maquiritares staring ahead, at the vociferous songster. Knowlton turned his face skyward and voiced the long-drawn, lugubrious bays of a hound. McKay laughed aloud, the sound of his mirth being drowned, however, by the discords of the other two.

"*Caramba!* What is the matter here?" demanded León, as the uproar ceased.

"Nothing," was Knowlton's sober response. "Tim had a bellyache and I had an earache. It's all over now. Proceed."

The Spaniard, after catching McKay's twinkling eye, proceeded. His pace now was almost a double time, and after a few rods of maintaining the new gait neither Tim nor his partners had breath to spare for vocal efforts.

Nothing further was said, except that Tim muttered something to himself about "guys that ain't got no ear for music," and the Maquiritares passed back one word which made Portonio snicker. Had he heard and understood that word, the red-headed man might have been wroth; for it was *areguato*—the Indian name for the big red howling monkey, than which no other tropical animal voices yells more atrocious.

The trail, despite windings and a few sharp pitches at the beginning, was quite direct and showed signs of much use. Fallen trees encumbered it at intervals, prone trunks of *mora*, *ceiba*, or other giants so hard or huge that no attempt to clear them away had been made; and around these the path detoured through thicker going, where an occasional *mecanilla* plam presented fearsome thorns to wound a carelessly swung hand.

Along the narrow aisle drifted rare and beautiful butterflies. Overhead, with soft whistles of alarm, a troop of broad-tailed *marimundos*, resembling great squirrels, went leaping away among the branches as the dreaded humans were spied. All around stood a labyrinth of tree and bush and woody cables, through which the blazing sun penetrated so weakly that the shadowy air was wondrously cool.

The muffled thunder of Equencua diminished to a growl, to a grumble, to a murmur—and died out. León held to his rapid stride, passing onward without sound save for the rustling of leaves touching him on either side. The Americans, a bit short-winded after their recent inactive voyaging in boats, were breathing hoarsely now, but keeping close behind. Suddenly he stopped.

"*Cuidado! Culebra!*" he warned. "Take care! Snake!"

His rifle darted to an aim. At the same instant a dark streak shot straight at him from under a fern, dead ahead. It failed—by inches only—to reach his feet. With blurring speed it twisted itself again into coil. During that infinitesimal interval the rifle-muzzle jerked downward to a new aim. A shot crashed—León leaped aside—a writhing form tumbled about in a whorl of blue smoke.

"*Ajo!*" he breathed. "That was close!"

Close, indeed; for only his swift, sure shot had saved him. The big bullet, shattering the reptile a few inches below the neck, had left the head intact, and as that head grew motionless its venomous flatness testified to its deadliness. Though the body still squirmed, its approximate length could be gaged—nearly ten feet. Its color was a bluish green, with blue-black patches along its back; a hue blending so closely with the shadowy forest growth as to make it virtually invisible to the sharpest eye.

"A *daya*," explained its slayer. "The worst snake in our country, for it is not only poisonous but vindictive. It always attacks. It will sometimes follow a man in order to attack him."

"Pleasant little playmate to meet in the dark," commented McKay.

"Very."

León drew his machete, cut off the head, and, impaling it on the point, cast it far to one side; then heaved the body after it.

As he cleaned the blade by shoving it repeatedly into the soil, an Indian called:

"What is it?"

"*Traga venado*," coolly lied the Spaniard. "A small one, asleep by the path."

The Americans gave him an odd look. They knew the *traga venado*, deer swallower, was the land boa, non-venomous and marked much differently than this deadly reptile. But they said nothing. León turned away, and the march was resumed.

Presently they emerged into sunlight. In a gap among the greenery, perhaps ten yards wide, stood a pole-framed, palm-roofed hut. Beyond, in what seemed a rocky creek, lay moored three dugouts. Mosquitoes appeared, though not in such swarms as below the cataract. León walked into the hut and waved a hand toward the rafters in mute invitation to hang hammocks. The Indians, coming on with increased speed, hastily doffed their pack-baskets and donned their shirts, through which the short-jawed insects could not bite. To the stings on legs, hands, and faces they gave no attention.

Hammocks were triced up, and a fire built outside, where Portonio laid aside his rifle and once more became a camp cook. The Indians, drawn by the magnet of fire, squatted mute and expressionless around it. Then said León, with a look toward the canoes:

"You now have passed the first barrier, friends. Up to Equencua any man can go—with a good boat and good luck. Beyond this fall no man can go, unless men of Guayana lead the way. Here is a maze of islands and rocks and rushing currents, where a stranger can lose himself forever. You will see more of this part tomorrow."

He paused, his gaze straying to the Indians.

"If you believe in omens, you had best turn back now," he added. "That snake which just struck at us on our first march—that was very bad luck. It was the worst kind of snake, you remember; and it lay squarely in our path and struck hard. If these men of mine knew what sort of snake that was and what it did, they would be badly worried."

The three laughed shortly.

"What happened to the bad luck after it struck?" reminded Knowlton. "It got smashed."

"Now ye're talkin', looey!" approved Tim. "We've bucked worse luck than that—howlin' head-hunters and cannibals and the kaiser and worse yet—and we're still goin' strong. Me, I'm stickin' on this trail."

"Right!" clipped McKay.

Loco León, the Mad Lion, smiled and shrugged.

"So be it," he answered, and began building a cigaret.

The hammocks swayed in silence for a time, their occupants lazily flapping away insects, blowing smoke, and resting. Then Knowlton remarked:

"Wonder where those wild chaps went to, those Tamara fellows. They lit out bright and early this morning."

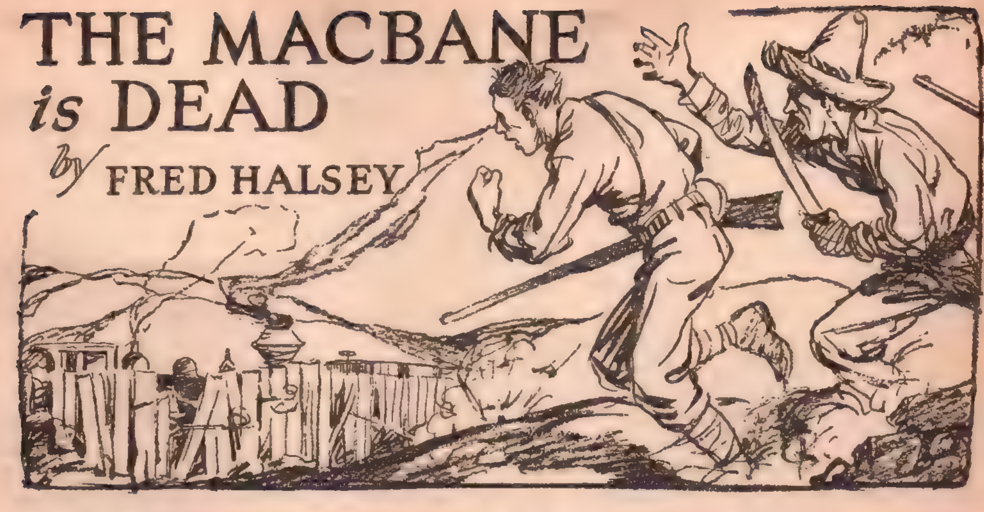
"I have wondered a little myself," admitted León. "Usually such visitors like to linger for a day or more. But one never can tell what those wild ones are thinking. Perhaps they were uneasy about remaining near so many white men. *Quién sabe?* My own men know only that they were gone before any one else arose."

They smoked on, while the sun climbed, the trees and the little gap became a pool of shadow. Beyond, the waiting dugouts swung at the ends of their ropes, nodding to one another as if sharing some secret of the savage old river. Beside the fire the Indians, who had overheard that name "Tamara," glanced cornerwise from face to face; then, their brown eyes inscrutable, gazed wordless into the smouldering flame.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE MACBANE *is* DEAD

by FRED HALSEY



Good old "Gol" Macbane passed out last month at Oaxcora He died fighting and took half a dozen Mexes with him. We got there too late to save him, but brought the body off and buried him on the ranch.

GHARRITY wrote that; Gharrity of El Paso, a stanch Obregon man and a good soldier. Macbane was on the other side—with the rebels in one of their last stands, but you can see that Gharrity loved him and would have saved him.

Macbane was the last of his branch of the tribe. I am not a pacifist; in fact it has been charged that I hate peace and have been a born disturber, but I believe that the day of pacifism is approaching rapidly, when Macbane has passed out and the Macbanes of his line are no more.

Macbane himself told me the story the night after the second day of fighting at Torreon, when Villa, then allied with Carranza, was sweeping southward, propelled by American capital and American volunteers to capture the city. It was a wonderful story; that of the Macbanes, of whom he was the last, and when Gharrity wrote that Gol was wiped out leading a handful of defeated, sullen Indian and half-breed rebels down near Yucatan, it seemed a fitting ending of a clan that never has fought but for a cause, and in defeat, always has been victorious. It is a strange story.

ON THAT foggy, cheerless morning in February of 1746 when the Duke of Cumberland led the armies of the English over the moor at Culloden to the forty minutes of struggle that determined whether the breeks or the kilties should rule the world; that morning when for the first—and perhaps the last—time in history the Scot fought on the defensive and awaited the attack, there was, in the ranks of the Highlanders, one Golice Macbane.

When the Highlanders, battered by English cannon and overriden by English horse, scattered; when the French crumpled and the exhausted, outnumbered, overhorsed and overcannoned forces of Bonny Prince Charlie fled to the hills of Roth, there was one who did not flee. He was Golice Macbane, who had been with Lochiel and Prince Charlie, who had led the wild attack of the clans at Falkirk before the MacDonalds joined the charge.

Wounded, with the victorious English swarming up the gentle slope of Culloden Moor, Golice Macbane, his target battered, his claymore grasped in his hand, stood with his back to the little clay bank overlooking the Firth of Moray and defied the armies of Cumberland.

Around him swirled the victorious attackers, already at work butchering the wounded and slaying prisoners. With the cry of his clan on his lips he faced them, his claymore swinging. For half an hour that one man stayed the line of the English. They have sung of Crockett in the Alamo or Horatius at the bridge, but who has sung of the Macbane at Culloden?

Gallant English officers cried orders that the man should be spared, but their men did not hear. Thirteen men were dead around him in a circle before his claymore ceased to swing, and an English bayonet finished the work.

Two of the sons of Golice Macbane had fallen on that bloody moor. Two others, too young to follow the pipes and banners of Prince Charlie were at home on the Highlands when the news came.

Of these two one, Sandy Macbane, reached America.

THE scene changes. Again a rebel is fighting for a Cause. Greene leading his ragged, undaunted troops through the swamps and canebrakes of the Carolinas found in his ranks a hairy, solemn man, who spoke with a deep voice and who read his Bible at nights over the camp-fires.

Down where the Congaree River flows toward Charleston, Greene, tired of retreating, forced his weary, tattered army across the Sangaree and Congaree Rivers and struck at the British at Eutaw Springs.

This time Scot faced Scot, for Lieutenant Colonel Campbell commanded the wild attack of the Americans and it was a Stuart, whose uncles had fought at Culloden, who led the British.

It was Sandy Macbane who led the charge. The British, forced back to the yard of a farm mansion, saw a wild, red-haired Scot charging. His gun was empty, and as he rushed forward the fighting cry of the Highlanders rose. He advanced at a run, clubbing his musket, beating down British soldiers. After him, from the dense undergrowth came the Americans led by Campbell. Half way to the house Campbell fell, mortally wounded.

In and around the house the British were yet giving desperate resistance. It was the Macbane who battered down the door with his musket, broke into the mansion and in a terrific hand-to-hand battle in the hallway fought his way through the house, leaving dead and wounded British along his path.

Terribly wounded, Macbane was carried away after the British fled toward Charleston, leaving nearly twelve hundred dead and wounded. He recovered, settled on a farm in Maryland, and more Macbanes came to bless the world and to fight its battles.

IT APPEARS that the Macbanes were peaceful folk, unless there was fighting to be done. The record of one generation is missing. Then came Angus, grandson of Sandy, great-grandson of Golice of the claymore at Culloden.

On a morning General Gordon's Confederates, trailing Hood's armies across Tennessee, came to a hill top overlooking Franklin. The Federals, they knew, were near.

Across a valley the Confederate staff officers saw a line of low earthworks, hastily thrown up, half way between the little creek that meanders through the valley and the summit of a parallel range.

American historians have been strangely meager in telling the stories of those Civil War battles in Tennessee where some of the most desperate and bloody fighting of the years of strife took place. And among the neglected battles is that of Franklin where, in the early light of morning, two armies struggled hand to hand until the Federals moved cannon around and swept the trench.

Gordon and his staff made a terrible blunder. Their glasses showed the little line of earthworks on the hillside weak and low. They consulted and ordered a frontal charge of the entire force.

The Rebel yell broke through the morning air, and the rushing line of gray swept down the hillside, leaped the brook, which already was reddening in spots, and rushed up the hill. As a wave breaks over a sandbar the rushing Rebels broke over those earthworks—hesitated, surprized at meeting so feeble resistance, and suddenly the Union forces, heavily entrenched along the crest of the hill, exploded with fire and smoke as a volcano erupts.

Caught on that bare hillside, their hideous mistake plain, the Confederates chose the only course. The officers ordered the charge continued and, rushing against that roaring range, the thinning line swept forward again.

From behind breastworks of logs, filled with stones and dirt, the Union forces mowed down the advancing army. Yet so impetuous and gallant was the charge that the Confederates reached the ditch at one side of the log and dirt embankment and poured into it. Separated only by the barricade, the two armies fought. Confederates lifted each other, clambered over each other, shoved muzzles of rifles through holes in the barricade and fired pointblank. Men fought savagely with clubbed guns. They climbed to the top of the barricade to be blown or battered back.

Their commander, buried under a heap of his own men, fell into the ditch. The Federals, seeing the tide of battle at its crest, were working desperately. Cannon were being dragged around and presently shrapnel commenced to rake through the ranks of the Rebels in the ditch—and the tide turned.

But at one point even the second barrier could not stop the Rebel rush. At that point the wave of gray broke entirely over the great rampart—and at the head of that rush was a wild man, red of hair, swinging a clubbed rifle. A long V of dead and wounded marked the farthest dash of that wave, and far up near the end of the V lay the body of the red-haired Scot who had followed Gordon.

The red-head was Angus Macbane.

NOW I come into the story.

Three days before the battle at San Juan Hill two men, clad in rags of what had been uniforms, but with rifles clean and ammunition fresh, emerged from a jungle and reported at Shafter's headquarters. One was a Swede named Nelson; the other was Walter Scott Macbane, son of Angus who fell at Franklin, great-great-great-grandson of Golice Macbane; him of the claymore and Culloden.

They had been three months with Gomez and had come to join the Americans. I happened to meet Walter Macbane after he had been given food and decent clothing and ordered to act as a scout.

On that morning when the Rough Riders started that glorious charge up the hill toward the blockhouse, Walter Macbane was on duty a few miles away. He reached the scene of the battle at a time when the Rough Riders were being checked and the Seventh was sweeping resistlessly upward to victory.

It was the Macbane who overtook the rushing negro troops and who was among the early arrivals at the blockhouse when the colors of Spain fell.

Those watching that reckless, wild, half-organized rush to victory through glasses asked who the red head was who was with the negroes. They found him, propped up against a tree, one bullet through his leg, another through the shoulder—and quite happy.

He, being a detached man, responsible to no one, a volunteer scout aiding the Americans, might have fared ill, because the hospital facilities were bad and sanitary conditions worse. But he asked only superficial aid. He might have died, but he was acclimated through weeks of jungle warfare with the Cubans, and came through with small help.

I happened to come back to the States with him. We reached Fernandina, where the camp was worse than a battlefield and more dangerous, and after his wounds were examined he asked me to help him reach Jacksonville—he would not take a chance with fever and other ills of the camp.

He came North with me as far as Savannah and became well acquainted. He promised to write when he reached his home near Lynchburg and told me something of his family.

THERE has been scant mention in history of the fight at Torreon. Villa, backed by American money, confident that he was leading a just cause, was driving the Federal army steadily back toward the City of Mexico. The rebel cause was confident of victory. Resistance had melted away rapidly and the "battles" were merely actions to delay the Villista rush in the hopes that the powers in the City of Mexico would rally and send fresh troops to the aid of the retreating army.

The retreat and pursuit was along the railway and at Torreon two railways from the north come down through valleys and unite. Villa, pursuing the retreating government forces, was pressing hard, using his fastest moving troops on the trains, and in the resultant confusion of moving an army over a railroad partially wrecked by the pursued, he left much of his meager artillery behind.

A fiery, impatient soul was this "bandit-patriot."

Torreon lies in a valley opening out to the south, with two narrower valleys debouching from the north. Villa, impatient and confident that the government troops were beaten, made a mistake: He ordered an attack without waiting for artillery to arrive. Down in the valley were the repair shops of the railroad, a high, broad fence surrounding them. He did not know that behind the thin boards of the fence there were loaded cars. On the first assault he learned of the mistake. The defenders, instead of fleeing, were making another stand. Villa received a severe mauling and his men were driven back.

Angered and wild over the delay, he ordered a second attack—and received a second mauling. The half-bare hills and fields were dotted with the dead.

The artillery was arriving. Villa, maddened, waited for another daybreak to attack. Before the third attack, however, the few pieces of artillery mounted battered down the fence, wrecking the cars and old engines behind it. Then the rebel forces swept down to the assault.

In the van of that attack was a young fellow with a fiery red thatch of hair, and I, watching through field glasses from the hill top, saw that madman leading the rush.

The government troops, knowing that resistance was no longer to avail, were fleeing toward their trains, leaving a small force to check the attack until the trains could bear the remnants of the beaten army out of reach of the vengeful pursuer.

This red-head was among the first to reach the broken fence. I saw him for a minute; then he disappeared into the enclosure.

Two hours later Doctor Nenuze was showing me around among the wounded. The good little doctor, who, by the way, was educated in Chicago and who had joined the Villistas as a common soldier because he and his family had grievances to adjust in Mexico, was cheery. The way to the capital was open; Villa was certain of capturing the city.

In a 'dobe shop, where the wounded were gathered for treatment, he showed me the red-head.

"This," he said, "is the wild Irishman who is the hero among our people; who has fought for us so gallantly."

"Irishman?" demanded the red head, whose head was swathed in first aid bandages and whose arm was bound up. "Say"—addressing me—"this —— greaser insists on calling me Irish."

His indignation was great, and I laughed.

"No one but a Scot could get that mad because he is called Irish," I remarked. "These people down here don't know there is any difference. You can't blame them. When it comes to fighting, you can't tell a Scot from an Irishman until you look to see whether he carries a scapular or a hymn book."

"Just the same, tell him I'm no Irish, but a Macbane."

"Not *the* Macbane?" I exclaimed.

"No, my father still lives," he said simply.

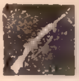
"Could he, by any chance, be named Walter?" I asked.

"Ye know me faither?" he asked, lapsing into the Scotch.

Thereupon we had a reunion, and I told him of meeting his father wounded at San Juan hill.

"I'm Golice Macbane," he said. "The last of my line."

It was during our long ride back to Juarez with a trainload of wounded from Torreon that Golice Macbane told me the tale of the first Golice, of the claymore and Culloden, the which I verified by reading Robert Chambers' history of Charles' rebellion in Scotland.



GOLICE MACBANE had gone from Virginia with an engineering firm into Mexico. He had seen the oppression of the people, and the rebel blood of the Macbanes, forever exciting and stirring rebel hearts, had caused him to join forces with the Villistas.

He promised to write and tell his father he had met me and to write to me when we parted at Jaurez. He did not, as his father had not, and his memory grew dim in my mind until, during 1918, I happened to be busy in New York and picked up a newspaper which had a story in it of the decoration of a hero by the British and French.

The man was an American, fighting with the British. Germany was at that time making the supreme effort; the final smash to break the Allies before the United States could throw her full force into the struggle.

The Germans had driven over the Ourcq, and the apex of the drive had reached a village named Troesnes. The allied forces seemed unable to stop the smash, but as the Germans, driving home the wedge, swept into Troesnes, a small force held the walled yard around a stable. There were seven in this crowd that refused to flee—and at their head was a big American, red-headed, terrible.

When the rallying British regiment saw the Germans checked, they pressed forward again. In the stable yard was this American surrounded by slain Germans and the bodies of his comrades.

He was decorated for gallantry and received medals from three governments, as his little squad had checked the peak of the German drive, broken it and enabled the British to gain time and return to the defense of the village where the German advance stopped.

The name on the medals was that of Golice Macbane.

He returned to the United States after months in English hospitals and told me in New York that he was going back to his old home in Virginia for a visit and to close up the estate of his father—and then into the Southwest. His lungs had been touched with gas, and he was still weak from the wounds. He thought the dry air of the Mexican border would help him.

OF THIS last affair I heard nothing, although the news that there was fighting in Mexico should have warned me that Macbane was in it.

He had promised to write, but it had become my settled conviction that the Macbanes hate writing as much as they love war.

Now comes the letter from Gharrity—and the line of Golice Macbane is broken.

I am convinced now that world peace is a possibility—as Golice Macbane left no son.

Slants on LIFE

by Bill Adams

The Dog Star

BEEN thinking again. Been sitting scratching my dog's ear and thinking. Nice little dog. She has more sense, and more humanity almost, than lots of humans whom I have met up with. What a wonderful thing is the love and care of an animal for her young! People have been coming over to see her puppies: Three ugly little bull pups, with not much to see but wrinkles.

Yesterday they disappeared mysteriously from their nest in the corner of my little barn. I looked round and by and by found them. She had dug a large round hole under the house and there she had taken them. I brought them out to the lawn. She smiled at me, in a superior and motherly manner and promptly lifted one by his hind thigh and bore him away to her newly made nest. In a very few minutes they were all back, under the house. Then she came and looked up, smiling at me, and requested me to scratch her under the ear. It would be rather nice if there actually were a dog star, would it not? Where we might in the hereafter meet up with our old dogs and hear just what they had to say.

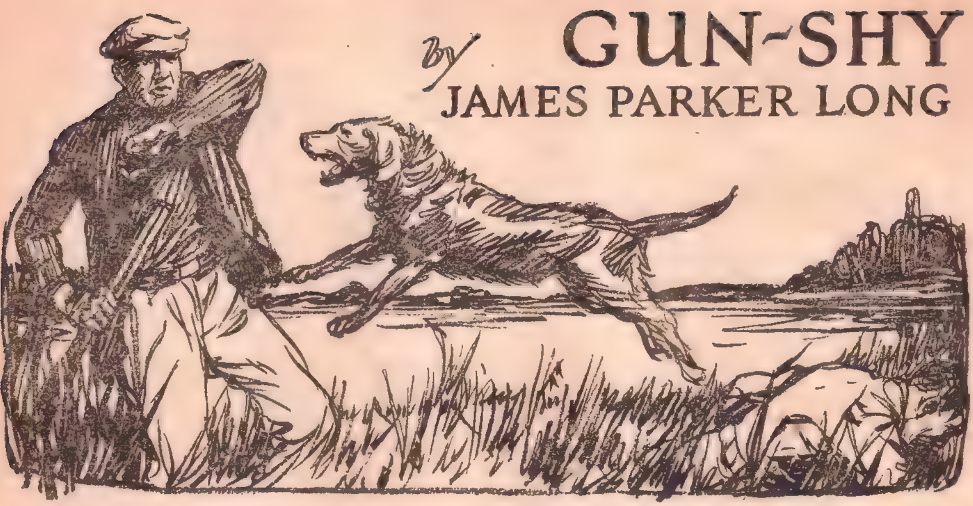
The complete trust and comradeship that a dog offers to a man is a lovely thing. Too bad so many men are not even fit for the trust of a little yaller dog! It is such an unwavering and utter trust. It ought to make a man the better, causing him to sense something of his responsibility to the animal creation. Don't you think so?

It would be rather correct, I think, if in the hereafter there is a dog star in which the dogs will live happily together with all their doggy affairs arranged to suit themselves. Then, perhaps, those humans who in this world have been unworthy of the confidence of their dogs will be led round on chains, and fed upon old bones, and occasionally dipped in sheep dip to kill their fleas, eh? Shut in the pound and left there till some dog comes along and agrees to pay for their license?

How's that for an idea, now? Think I'm mad for sure, don't you? Well—maybe I am, but it was the mother of the puppies below my house who put me wise to it. You'd better look out. Maybe you will have to wear a muzzle yet, in dog star land!

GUN-SHY

by JAMES PARKER LONG



Author of "The Killer," "The Price of Freedom," etc.

JUSTICE MAYBERRY stopped pawing in his five-pound, cowhide Justice's Manual and shoved his glasses up on his forehead to receive the verdict of the six-man jury.

"What say you, guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty."

"There now, 'Cud' Jenkins. I told you you'd never make out a case coming in here and blatting that you seen them Steiners drawing a net and then fetching in a net and saying it was the one. That might be evidence if you all weren't sore enough at each other so you'd like to spit in each other's faces, but this way it won't wash.

"You Steiners can go but you better watch your step; we know as well as you that you're just as guilty as Judas Priest. You, Cud, you stick around a minute, I want to talk to you."

The audience snickered and all four of them slapped the domineering Jake Steiner and his paler echoes, Terry and Ad, on their shoulders and clumped out of the room. The justice paid no attention as he struggled to note the details of the trial in his docket and no more did the plaintiff, Cud Jenkins, he whose perpetually bulging cheek had earned him his name. He sat in a chair by the justice's table, chewed, patted his constant companion, the curly, self-possessed retriever by his side and watched the growth of a spider web in a ceiling corner.

At last the entry was made and the cracked voice struck up:

"—— you, Cud, what's got into you anyhow? Since you got that bug about the game getting all cleaned out you're in a mess all the time. If you keep on you won't have a friend left. Have you got any now?"

"None but Fetch here. I'm satisfied."

"Huh! You're easy satisfied. A dog that sweats off ten pounds every time he hears a gun fired ain't my idea of a dog."

Cud said nothing, but his fingers squirmed through the oily hair. The judge went on:

"Folks don't like to have a man poking in where he's got no business. There's officers, game wardens and the like, to take care of all that sort of thing. Why in time don't you let 'em do it and buzz wood? You aren't ever in your shop any more. What you living on?"

"Oh, I have some saved up. And the reason why I can't leave it to your game wardens and troopers is that year after year the game gets scarcer and those Steiners get it and laugh their heads off. The only man that will ever stop them is a man who knows as much about poaching and about that swamp as they do and that is me. Till I saw what we were doing to the game I reckon I was as bad as Jake himself, which is the main reason why I have to stop it."

"That may be all very true but you're done. Those Steiners can hoss it to you right now for false arrest and persecution and such like. They're gossiping around town that you are making all this fuss to

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"Gun-Shy" copyright, 1925, by James Parker Long.

cover up something shady of your own. With your past history and the way every one feels about you now, you would be as safe in court as you'd be scrapping snakes and a bite behind. Now don't you see why I want you to go easy?"

"Uh-huh. But, say, I been thinking. If I get a picture of Jake Steiner drawing a net do you suppose the jury will believe what I tell them?"

"Just as sure as taxes. But that sounds as if you weren't going to do as I tell you."

"I guess it does. Seems as if the only thing I am interested in is getting Jake Steiner and getting him good. What right have those hellions to steal game that was put there for every one?"

"All right, bullhead, go to it. You've been told."

Cud rambled out, the silent dog so close at heel that it seemed a miracle that he did not get his nose bumped, and went across the street toward "Detwiller's."

The town's folk stood about in groups, the largest group about Jake Steiner. They split as Cud approached and Jake came to him and shook a fist under his chin.

"I'm telling you here and now," he bawled, "the next time you monkey with me you get yours. I won't bother with the law; I'll just naturally take you and beat the tripe out of you by hand. D'ye get that?"

It was plain that he could do it. His heavy arms and hairy fists seemed fit to grapple with a gorilla, but the pipestem legs of Cud did not carry him a single step backward.

"I told you, when you wouldn't quit shooting wood duck and give them a chance to breed back, that you would have to stop or be stopped. The wood duck were the first, but now the quail are gone and the partridge. If you'd been half a sport I couldn't have stayed away from you, because I like to hunt better than the next fellow myself, but the scarcer the game got, the worse hog you were. Even when they'd got so scarce there wasn't any money in it, you'd hunt out every last one, just to take away the fun I had watching them. But you're done now. You stop, or I'll stop you."

"How will you do it? By taking pictures?"

That was funny. The whole street rocked with mirth, led by Jake. Through it all Cud remained unmoved externally, though he winced internally at this knowledge that his talk with the justice had been overheard. The joke gave him a chance and, still followed by the dog who was walking stiff-legged, a ruff of bristled hair on his shoulders, he went into the store where a grinning clerk sold him the desired kodak, fitted with telephoto lens and autographic device.

Then he went down to the waterfront, tossed his load of groceries into his little steel duckboat, laid the kodak carefully on a seat and spoke to the dog who, treading dead center with the cunning of long practise, took his place in the stern.

Cud teetered aboard, took his place facing his dog and, as his eyes roamed over the square, muscular body picking out one hairless spot after another in the crisp, liver-colored pelt, wondered as to the future. Those spots were the marks of a charge of buckshot which had left the dog torn and bleeding, crippled for six months and, though his master's loving care had made a dog of him again, it was a different dog.

He had always loved one master and barely tolerated the rest of the world. He still loved him and to that love was added open adoration, written plainly in those wide-open, brown eyes. His toleration of every one else was gone. In its place was open hatred, which needed many lessons before he was willing to let the world live and to stick to his master's heels.

The main change in him was evidenced the first time his master reached for his gun. That dog who had lain in the blinds while guns roared and grew hot, who had, at the command of his master or of the officers with whom his master had worked, trailed poachers through the marsh paths, who had many times faced fire before that day when he was shot down, that dog, Fetch, the stouthearted, had dropped tail and slunk under a table. That fall the hunting season with its banging guns brought months of agony to the big, beautiful fellow cowering within the tiny swamp shanty which was his master's home, since he had devoted his life to the protection from man's greed of the finned, furred and feathered inhabitants of the swamp.

And now Jake, the man who had boasted that he had fired that shot, had been goaded, to judge by his actions of the day, to a point where his threats against the dog's master might at any time boil into just such action. Cud's face was set wrathfully as he jerked his little boat across the end of the lake and into the mouth of the swamp channel; but there was no hesitancy in the strokes which carried him on his self-appointed evening trip down the channel, grapples dragging, groping for nets or fish traps.

While his eyes watched the great rafts of passage ducks and geese dropping down on the lake beyond, his mind grappled with the never ending problem: How, where and when could he catch the Steiners and prove that to them was due the destruction of the once teeming swamp wild life.

At the mouth of the inlet again, he wondered at the dense accumulation of ducks and geese over by Skinner's Island—a half submerged sand bank with a tiny hogback of low brush and trees. There were usually ducks there during flight, but today, in thousands, they crowded about the point of the bar, fluttering and splashing. It was probably all right but it was not natural, and anything which was not natural was worth investigating. Cud was a thorough sort of fanatic.

IT WAS dark by the time he reached there but a few minutes' search in the faint afterglow revealed a half buried kernel of corn. Some one was baiting that bar and island. But who? And why? It was something which Cud would have liked to have done, himself, if he could have afforded it. Nothing else would so bolster up the strength of these northbound flyers, and fit them for further flight and the strain of the nesting season, as a week or two full fed with corn before their instinct moved them on. But who else was there in the whole valley who felt as he did about the rapidly dwindling flocks?

Of course, hunters from time immemorial had baited their quarry to a spot where they might be slain, but no one would dare shoot, out there in the open. Crude work such as that would bring every peace officer in the country on to their backs. Certainly the Steiners would never be mixed up in any such thing. Unless there were a joker somewhere. But what could it be?

Cud took the problem home with him and turned it over and over in his mind, till at midnight he could stand it no longer. Outfitted with a shovel, his camera, a loaf of bread, a jug of cold tea and his dog, he slipped his boat out on to the inlet and pulled down the mirror track, through the drowned trees and out over the glassy swells to the island.

The air was already redolent of morning and full of sleepy talk from the wildfowl when he landed his outfit. He used his shovel and half filled his little boat with sand. When enough was in so that he was sure the buoyancy of the watertight compartments were counterbalanced, he shoved out and sank the little skiff in waist-deep water, at a spot where the weeds were so thick that there was little danger of discovery.

The hill to the east was faintly outlined with a phosphorescent glow and a little flock of killdeers had scudded overhead by the time he had waded to the shore; and much must yet be done. The ruined blind where he had lain so many mornings must be repaired and all signs of his coming must be swept away. It was familiar work, and loved work, and work well and speedily done.

By the time the first knot of pintails that had swept in to glean the crumbs of yesterday's feast had seen him, and had banked till they stood on end and had fled off like shadows into the living haze, he was ready, had taken that for a signal and had packed himself, his dog, and his impedimenta into his cramped prison for his long vigil.

Save for the dimples caused by a feeding grebe the lake lay with the polished immobility of burnished metal, as far as the eye could pierce the mist. Beyond that curtain rose the tumult of the awakening flocks. Toward the shore could be heard the deep voices and the ceaseless splash, splash of the tip-tilting black duck and greenheads.

Far out on the lake, at more and more frequent intervals came the squatting rush as the separate flocks of blue bills and whistlers took the air, whizzed past overhead with whistling pinions and again skidded to the water. By the time the mist had risen half way to the top of Roundhead, the scouts had reported and the shore was surrounded by the merging flocks; the last remaining kernels were being scooped from the bottom by the greedy bills.

Chill and cramp were forgotten by Cud,

as he lay and feasted his eyes on the wealth of wild life before him. Just such flocks had been raised and lived for three-quarters of the year in his marsh, in the early days of his hunting. Gone they were now, gone the clamorous mornings, gone the flashes of color as the beauties whirled up over the stream, gone because of the greed of man, partly because of his own greed.

The emptiness, the haunted, deserted silence of the swamp that had brought him to a realization of the ruthlessness of his means of livelihood, had left the Steiners unmoved; and his desertion of them and his sermonizing had only spurred the precious trio to increased destructiveness.

It was years since he had seen a brood of young wood duck or teal on the sloughs. For a few weeks only in the spring and in the fall did the flocks tarry and then they hurried away; warned from the evil spot by the accumulated wisdom of generations, which passes for instinct.

Before the sun had barely topped the hill and burned away the haze, an hysterical black-bellied plover screamed and sprang into the air. The next instant the air was full of beating wings, and the instant after, the island was deserted. Cud shoved in another chew, drew his camera into position bearing on the shallows where the corn had been scattered, and waited.

A boat glided around the point and grated on the sand. It contained three men. The one who stepped out into the water, heavy grain bag on shoulder, was Jake Steiner. The other two were his less aggressive brothers, Terry and Ad. These last were busy with something in the boat, but Jake tipped the mouth of the bag and ran a stream of yellow kernels out into the shallow water, up along shore and back, knee deep, and as he passed the blind Cud pressed the bulb and twisted the spool to number two.

The two others were out by now and following him, Ad carrying a tub and Terry feeding out of it a line to which were tied leaders every foot or so, and to those leaders were tied hooks, baited with fat, soaked kernels of corn, Their images in due course were transferred to the film, as was Jake's when he again passed the blind, staking down the line at ten-foot intervals.

"There is evidence that will fetch them," thought Cud; but he did not yield to his temptation to stand out and denounce them. The three Steiners, possibly armed would welcome the opportunity to make it unhealthy for him. He began to wish that he had brought his gun in spite of the fact that it would have made Fetch unhappy for the whole day. He laid his hand on that bristling dog to make sure that no sound passed those skinned-back lips.

The setting of the line was speedily accomplished. The men worked in silence and at top speed and, so soon that their visit must have seemed a momentary whim to any possible shore observer by the time the boat again shot out on the lake, and Cud was alone.

Now that spring shooting was illegal and no fishing season yet open, and since the cottagers had not yet come, the lake was deserted. Cud scowled, as the devilish efficiency of the scheme soaked in.

Given an abandoned lake, great flocks of tired and hungry northbound flyers and a baited bed, it was no wonder that the Steiner car, piled high with packages, made frequent trips to the city. The thing was fool proof, or it would be, if it were not for Cud Jenkins lying there, cramped and shivering on the damp sand floor of his blind.

He was mighty uncomfortable, but at least he could thrill with triumph that at last he had indisputable evidence that would stop the Steiner activity for a while at least, and that he had the means to get more at any time they resumed. The more he thought it over the better the camera looked. Details for its use came to him. For one thing, he could drift down on the Steiner boat as they tended one of their illegal gill nets, get a picture by flash-light and escape in the darkness before men tangled in netting and blinded by the flare could take up the chase.

By now the first birds were coming back, the grebes, then the fishducks cruising along the shore, noisy, winnowing flights of bay birds, and finally a great flock of mallards swinging overhead like glinting, green-headed cannon balls, beating back against the rising breeze. Then a great splashing as the heavy bodies took to the water and swam to the corn.

Almost at once one of the tail-up drakes swallowed a kernel in which was a hook. At the flurry of his struggles the other birds leaped wildly and circled the island, but all too soon that swirl and eddy in the water was over, and all was quiet. The next bird's fight sent them not as far, and soon, so great was their hunger, they merely swam anxiously away from those unexplained madnesses which seized their companions and closed in hastily when drowning had ended the flurry.

Cud watched till he had two pictures of birds struggling in the shallow water and then lay with his closed eyes on his arms and fought with his desire to go out and save the rest of the birds by driving them away. It was long past noon when the corn had all been gleaned and the hooks filled with drowned ducks. The others drew off to deeper water or squatted on the tip of the bar and slept with the soundness of the replete.

THE sun was getting along to that angle which would make clear pictures hard to take, and Cud had about decided that his case would have to rest on the evidence of the pictures he already had, with the addition of a section of that line with its victims, when the hurried departure of the birds announced the return of the boat.

The three brothers were back and proceeded to remove the signs of their work. The boat was beached and Terry and Ad, bushel baskets in hand, walked along the shore and picked up the birds which Jake cut off from the leaders and tossed in to them. Three pictures of their work Cud took in the fast failing light, and then settled down to wait and wonder whether the pictures would be distinguishable.

As if to give him a better chance, Ad started back with a loaded basket, cutting across from the far side of the point and passing close before the blind. With eager fingers Cud shifted his focus. Those duck heads hanging over the edge would clinch the case. When Ad was barely six feet away he pressed the bulb. The shutter clicked and Ad stopped as if shot, dropped his basket and leaped toward the blind.

Fetch's smothered growl swelled to a roar of attack as he obeyed his master's "take him." Bursting through the reed front he struck for the throat. He was met by a warding forearm, set his teeth, wrenched and leaped clear, all with the suddenness of a member of the cat tribe.

Cud acted hardly less rapidly, snapped shut his precious camera, burst through the screen, hurled his shovel at Terry and started legging it for the Steiner boat. Save for the single oath uttered by Terry as the shovel barked his shins and Ad's shriek, "He has a camera!" no word was spoken. The only sound was the crunch of boots beating through the sand and the snarls of the dog as he circled Ad, singing his song of hate and tearing at the white faced man who was fighting for his very life and knew it.

Then Jake took a hand. Standing there, thigh deep in the water, too far away to join the pursuit, beyond revolver range for the ordinary shot, he pawed out a revolver, rested his hand on his flung-up left upper arm and fired at the fleeing Cud. The bullet flicked up sand, close, too close, behind him. Again and again he fired. One ball went wild but the other was so close that its whistle was loud in Cud's ears. Again, and this time the runner stumbled and dived, all in one motion, on to the sand. He was within six feet of the boat, so well had he run. But run as he had, the liver-colored dog had run faster. When the master slumped on to the sand the dog was already leaping into the boat and a breath later he cowered as far beneath a thwart as he could crowd.

The fallen man struggled to his hands, still clutching the camera, but was upset by Terry as, obedient to Jake's roar, he "put the boots to him." Jake was splashing out of the lake, smoking weapon in hand, commanding—

"Get that camera!"

As Cud fell he rolled over on to the camera still farther and hugged it to his chest. Terry tried to turn him, failed, and again "put the boots to him." As the heavy boot struck the side of Cud's chest there was a thud and a crack as of broken firewood. From the set lips of the little man burst his first sound, half a scream, half a moan, cut short by the gritted teeth of manhood. With that sound came another, the scratching of hurrying claws and a strangling snarl of rage as Fetch came back. There was a gun out there, true enough, but his master was suffering and anything could be faced, except that.

As he left the boat, Jake, still too distant for effective shooting, ordered—

"Drop back, Terry, while I kill the mutt!"

With suspicious eagerness Terry dropped back from this dog that was coming with a slavering rush that it would have taken a brave man to have faced. In the instant before Fetch struck, the gun cracked.

He dropped flat on the sand, swinging his head from side to side, seeking escape, half paralyzed by fear. The pain of his wound came to him and he gnawed his foot. Finally, as the sobbing, struggling breaths of his injured master again reached his brain he sprang forward, hardly slower on three legs and the stump of a broken one than he had been on four.

The gun, that dreaded gun, had again touched him and it had failed to kill him. What was a smashed leg? This thing that he had feared was evidently not as powerful as it had seemed. Jake pulled the trigger again and had for answer the click of the hammer on an empty shell.

"Keep him busy while I get the shotgun," he yelled, running toward the boat, but also toward Fetch's master who was again on hands and knees, struggling toward the boat, dragging one leg like a dead thing, behind him.

At Jake's third stride the dog arrived to keep him from his man. His first slash reached the wrist. He pinched till his teeth grated on bone and dropped, to spring out and back, snapping again and again at the warding arm.

Terry, never the fighting Steiner, turned and ran, glad of any excuse which would give him a breathing space away from that white fanged demon, and honestly afraid to try to pass him without a weapon, he screeched as he ran—

"Hold him while I get a club."

Jake felt moved to utter strong remarks at this desertion, but he had no time to make them. That beast of a dog before him, leaping in and out in tune to his throbbing snarl, wanted to kill and it took all of Jake's strength to keep him from it. That chunky body was rarely there when he kicked at it and when he missed, his hands and arms, thrown up to protect his face, received terrible punishment. At last Terry started back, armed with a great chunk of driftwood.

The crawling, gasping, laboring Cud had reached the boat and was thrusting painfully, trying to start it off the shore. A glance at the battle told him that the dog's ascendency could not last. With Terry back, armed and with the bravery of the best equipped, it would be two to one.

The dog could not stop them both and he, himself, was useless—unless he had a weapon! He abandoned his attempt, gripped the gunwale, and rolled himself across it, his injured leg following after, with a final contorted flip that wracked his body and turned the world black before his swirling eyes.

By the back seat leaned a shot gun. To it they crawled, the man and the leg which seemed no part of him now, but an enemy, gripping, clinging, tearing at his very vitals, aiding in its attempt to hold him back by his broken rib which stabbed deeper and deeper into his lungs.

He struggled into the seat and opened the gun, exulting in the gleam of the brass shell butts, and commanded, with a voice which would hardly obey his will—"Come in, Fetch."

Twice he called, almost fainting with the pain of his broken breast, before the dog heard him. At once he obeyed, left his enemy as suddenly as he had attacked him and jumped into the boat, wriggling all over with happiness, heedless of the dreaded weapon in his master's hands.

Cud summed up the situation. Ad was out of it, sitting by the blind where the dog had left him, sobbing with the pain of his torn hands. Terry was uninjured but armed only with a club and Jake, though he had the will to fight, was obviously in no condition to do so, after the punishment he had received from that smiling, fawning creature in the boat.

He leveled the gun at Terry. "Drop that club and come here," he ordered.

Terry dropped the club and turned to run.

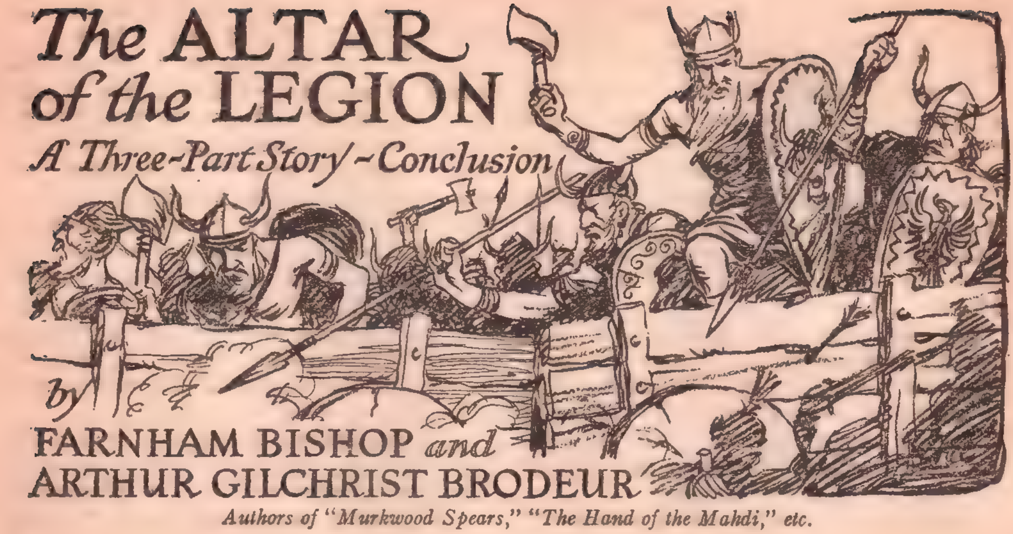
"Don't you," gritted Cud, and he stopped. At the command, menaced by the gun barrels, he stepped the little mast, hoisted the leg-of-mutton and pushed off the boat. Cud thrust over the tiller. The sail filled and the little craft gathered headway, bearing true for the distant dock.

"I'll have a doctor and a constable here as soon as I can," Cud promised, lashing the tiller as a precaution against unconsciousness. Then he peered overhead.

A tiny flight of little ducks was passing over and as if in promise of a better time one of them showed the brave colors of a drake wood duck.

The ALTAR of the LEGION

A Three-Part Story—Conclusion



by

FARNHAM BISHOP *and* ARTHUR GILCHRIST BRODEUR

Authors of "Murkwood Spears," "The Hand of the Mahdi," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

TO LEGIONIS ASA, last outpost of the Roman Britons, fled Prince Meriaduc, son of King Owain of North Wales, and Niall of the Sword for aid against the Saxon hordes. For diplomatic reasons Meriaduc was impersonating his sister, the Princess Gwenlian, who lay ill at Aquæ Sulis.

On the southern coast of Damnonia they were attacked by a landing-party of Saxons, and were saved from massacre only by the intervention of Drusus, Prefect of the Damnonian March, and his legion.

During the ride to Bellerium, principal city of Legionis Asa, Drusus agreed to get the aid Meriaduc sought.

But the next day Niall insulted Nicator and Ventidius, who held the reins of government in Bellerium and who hated Drusus for his popularity. In revenge for the insult they turned the vote of the Senate away from sending legions against the Saxons.

In consternation Drusus arose in the Senate.

"Fathers of the People," he shouted, "I bow to the decree of the Senate. I now ask only permission to go with my command to serve under Owain's banner."

But this permission was withheld until the next meeting of the Senate four days hence.

In the mean time Tullia Marciana, ward of Drusus's Aunt Sophonisba, who was in love with Drusus and jealous of the supposed Princess Gwenlian, went secretly to Ventidius and Nicator and prevailed upon them to call a meeting of the Council of Three. The council gave permission for Drusus to go against the Saxons, but with only a hundred men.

Fearing for the loss of his trade in tin with Aquæ Sulis, were that city to fall a victim to the Saxons, Carbo stirred up the populace against Ventidius.

Next morning Drusus, leading his hundred men out of the city, halted at the shouts of angry voices.

"Hark! What is that?" cried Niall.

Then they made out the words, roared by the mob of laborers:

"Ventidius! A rope for Ventidius!"

BUT Drusus, coming upon the mob, who wished to make him king, hushed them and bade them go to their homes and preserve the peace. Then in silence and honor, he led his men from the city.

On coming into the Cornish hills, the legion was ambushed by a landing-party of Saxons. When the Saxons had been repelled, Nicator was found on one of their longships.

The legion were all for killing him, but Nicator confessed his guilt with Ventidius in selling Bellerian prisoners as slaves to the Saxons and of having given military information to the enemy. Drusus spared Nicator, who promised to stand trial before the Senate.

In the mean time Corinium had fallen to the Saxons, and King Owain rode to Brig Hill to stop their advance. Here, amid fearful havoc to both sides, Owain was killed.

When Drusus reached Aquæ Sulis he heard the news of battle from the refugees from Corinium. He also learned that the Princess Gwenlian, impersonating her brother, had left Aquæ Sulis for Bellerium.

Drusus, realizing that Aquæ Sulis, could not withstand the Saxon attack, led the people to Caerleon.

In Caerleon Drusus learned of the workings and plans of a new sort of catapult; Drusus turned over Caerleon to the townspeople and sailed out the bay for Castellum Maris.

Landed, he learned that the Princess Gwenlian was to marry Ventidius that night.

Riding all day with Niall of the Sword by his side and leading five-score cataphracts, Drusus arrived in Bellerium in time to stop the marriage ceremony. Standing in the cathedral, he denounced Ventidius as a traitor.

Immediately the crowd became an angry mob. Terrified at the turn of events, Ventidius fled.

The mob followed to his house, and found it in flames. Fire-brands and sparks spouted to the heavens. The walls toppled, swayed and crashed thunderously down.

"So may he roast forever!" shouted a voice in the crowd.

CHAPTER XV

THE MAN WITH THE BROKEN NOSE

"FROM Nicator? Let him enter." Tullia Marciana threw down the manuscript she had been vainly trying to read, stole a glance at the mirror of polished steel and leaned back unhappily in her cushioned chair. Her face was so haggard that she would have refused to let any see her but a slave.

Yesterday in the church she had tasted supreme happiness for one moment when she realized that Drusus still lived. One instant of rapture, then Gwenlian's glad cry brought back to Tullia with cruel suddenness the knowledge that she existed for her cousin Drusus only as his kinswoman and playfellow.

On the instant all the jealous pangs and griefs that his supposed death had softened, almost cured, sprang into sharply renewed life, and would permit her no rest, no sleep. They had been days of sadness, but of peace for Tullia, those days during which they had thought Drusus dead.

The hanging stirred so slightly that she did not observe it. The messenger stole in silently, seeming to materialize out of the air. Yet when Tullia looked up and saw him, he appeared solid enough: A great block of a man, whose arms, bare to the elbows, bulged with muscle.

His stolid features would have been ordinary but for the ugly nose, broken across the bridge and so twisted to one side as to give a sinister grotesqueness to his face. He bowed reverently, and drew from the folds of his loose tunic a closed tablet.

Tullia broke the seal. As she read, anger, surprize, pique flitted across her face.

"Do you know what is written here?" she asked.

The fellow nodded in affirmation, and said:

"I am to take an answer."

Glancing from the impression on the broken seal to the blue and yellow badge embroidered on the messenger's tunic, Tullia made sure the design was that of Nicator's house. There was no "signature" in the modern sense: The words incised on the wax-coated inner surface of the tablets might have been formed by any scribe; but by all the tests of the time, the message seemed authentic.

Yet Tullia was astonished. Nicator had been one of her admirers since she first reached womanhood; and though she had always smiled at his affection, she enjoyed the compliment it implied. Nicator was a connoisseur on beauty.

And now Nicator, after forfeiting her friendship by engaging in the schemes of Ventidius against her cousin's life, had sent her a secret message asking an interview with the Princess Gwenlian! Her first impulse was to return an indignant refusal; but she was curiously tempted by the situation.

"Is it a matter of state?" she asked, knowing well that it was not.

The messenger shook his head.

"It concerns my master alone," he answered.

Tullia was still more than half-minded to send him away with a curt refusal, while she sat there thinking, playing with an idea that promised comfort. The plea for secrecy—if Nicator had conceived the sublime impudence of transferring his affections to the Welsh princess!

She knew the dictator's friendship could restore Nicator to his old prestige, could even raise him high in popular favor. His crime was already forgiven, as far as Drusus was concerned; his full liberty would be restored as soon as he had testified at the trial of Ventidius.

If Nicator had fallen in love with Gwenlian, and could hide his secret from Drusus, might he not become a dangerous rival? He knew well how to please women. In the end Tullia's jealousy overcame discretion and pride. Any means of removing Gwenlian from Drusus was fair, so long as Gwenlian was not harmed. And who would harm her? Certainly not Nicator.

Tullia raised her eyes to the messenger's. His disfigured face raised an ominous foreboding in her heart, above which, however, her words flowed evenly:

"Tell your master the Princess will be in the garden within the hour," she said.

The man vanished through the curtains.

"I HAVE news for you, dear," said Tullia, entering the other's chamber.

"Has Drusus found Ventidius?" Gwenlian asked eagerly.

The women had had no news since the

evening before, when Meriaduc, sent by Drusus, had come to tell them that the prefect had been proclaimed dictator, that Ventidius had escaped from the church, and was now being hotly searched for by the entire detective force under the guidance of Nicator.

This was before the house of the traitor had been fired. Neither Drusus nor Niall had come home, and in the early morning Meriaduc had returned to them, leaving the three women alone with the house slaves.

Gwenlian was sewing up a rent in Meriaduc's cloak and was soothed by feminine employment, Meriaduc's safety, and the relief of appearing in her own character. Revived hopes for her country lent a sparkle to her beauty, while sleeplessness and self-torture had ravaged Tullia's. This was fuel to the inner fire that consumed the Bellerian girl.

"Drusus has not yet found Ventidius, so far as I know," she answered Gwenlian; "but his most trusted helper in the search is coming to see you—if he may?"

"Who may that be?"

"Who but Nicator, of course," answered Tullia, pronouncing the name in a tone of marked respect.

"That weakling!" said Gwenlian contemptuously. "Why should I suffer the presence of such as he?"

"You forget that he saved Drusus's life in battle at the peril of his own," Tullia reminded her. "And having been chief of police for so many years, he is invaluable in a task of this kind. They could never find Ventidius without him."

"But what can Nicator have to say to me?"

"How can I tell? Perhaps—but never mind." Tullia paused, seemed to consider a thrilling secret.

"What is it? Tell me," Gwenlian begged.

"It is only an idea of mine," whispered Tullia, whose imagination had been fed on books like "The Secrets of the Cæsars" and "Memoirs of the Court of Nero." "Nicator, knowing how deeply Ventidius is infatuated with you—and what man would not be?—may well be thinking to use you as a bait to draw him from his hiding place and so capture him. But of course that couldn't be allowed; it would be out of the question for you to run any risk."

"I would run any risks," said Gwenlian with a shining face, the blood of her fighting sires rising hot within her. "While Ventidius is at large, neither Drusus nor Britain is safe. I will see Nicator when he comes."

"You can not receive him here," said Tullia then. "My mother has gone forth to impress her friends with her new and awesome social position as the dictator's aunt. Save for the slaves, you and I are alone. Still—we could go down into the garden. Shall we receive him there?"

* * *

"WHAT are these strange, broad-leaved trees, Tullia? I have long marveled at them, and meant to ask you their name. We have none like them in North Wales."

"There is no place in Britain warm enough for them but Bellerium," Tullia answered. "They are palms from the Holy Land, sent as a gift to our city by the pious Emperor Constantine. Have I shown you the letter he wrote to our ancestor who bore his banner? Wait, and I will get it."

Gwenlian waited, happier than she had been for a long time, for was she not, in all probability, to be given some way to serve her oppressed people? Her back was turned to the vine-covered wall that hid the garden from the street, and to the arcaded passage leading to the street door, which, contrary to custom, was ajar.

She did not hear a closed litter stop almost noiselessly at the door, nor see the four burly bearers who silently set it down. The curtains parted and a fifth, clad like the others in the livery of Nicator, joined them, and led the way, without knocking, in through the door.

Softly, in felt-soled sandals, they crept down by the colonnade which opened on the garden. Screened by the fluted pillars and the climbing vines, they reached the garden gate and tiptoed unobserved toward the marble bench where Gwenlian sat with her glowing thoughts, waiting for Tullia's return.

A mother-bird, startled from her nest in the roses, darted out with noisy flutter of wing.

Turning, Gwenlian screamed as she beheld a stalwart man, made hideous by a broken nose, coming swiftly at her on noiseless feet, hands, like the claws of a huge hawk, outstretched to snatch her. The next instant one of the terrible hands was over her mouth and she was held helpless in a brawny arm.

Quickly the others wound a scarf about her struggling body, muffled her face in fold on fold, and bore her rapidly over the soft turf toward the service gate which opened into a quiet side street.

Through the open casement of Tullia's window rang the Welsh girl's scream. Startled, Tullia sprang to her feet, ran down the stairway and out into the corridor. Through the vine-leaves she saw a muffled form being borne out by the service gate.

Gwenlian abducted! This was no part of the arrangement in the letter. Was Nicator mad? A wave of revulsion at her own part in the crime rolled over her. With a ringing cry for help, she ran to the stables across the garden, beat on the door, and fell into the arms of the head groom as he opened it.

"Rouse the slaves!" she ordered. "Bring every man and bid them arm! The Princess Gwenlian has been abducted! Follow me!"

She ran toward the service gate, darted through just in time to see the last of the ruffians turn the corner at the end of the lane. Fearlessly Tullia pursued, kilting up her flowing skirts as she ran.

Just before she reached the corner, two long-legged stable boys dashed past her, yelling and brandishing pitch-forks as they disappeared round the turn. Came the thud of heavy blows. Turning the corner, Tullia nearly fell over the senseless bodies of the boys. Before her stood two ruffians who had served thus effectively as a rearguard.

With one accord they leaped for her, but before either could lay hands on her, the girl snatched up one of the pitch-forks and thrust at the throat of the nearest. He sprang back, barely in time to escape a transfixed neck.

His comrade tried a flank movement, forcing Tullia to draw back, till both were beyond the corner, when abruptly her assailant turned and ran, shouting to his fellow:

"Flee for your life! Here they come!"

The rest of the household were streaming to the rescue: More stablemen with forks and hunting-spears, kitchen knaves with knives and cleavers, mattocks—anything they could snatch up as they ran. Giving tongue in many keys, they passed their mistress, as she courageously gave chase to the two now vanishing around a second corner, in the direction of the waterfront. After them roared the hue and cry, gaining recruits from every house.

Being unencumbered, the pursuers gained rapidly. But the lead was great enough to enable the abductors to reach the end of the last lane and the open southern hillside, which sloped steeply toward the cliffs and the sea below.

"We have them!" the head groom shouted triumphantly. "The abandoned house!"

The closed and abandoned house stood a scant bowshot away on the very edge of the unscalable cliff. Panting up to its door the fugitives stood while one of them fitted a massive key in the lock, threw the door open and made way for the two who carried Gwenlian. All were within and the door slammed, locked and barred, before the nimblest pursuer reached the shadow of the house.

"Break down the door!" gasped Tullia as she ran breathlessly up.

She knew the place well: A landslide twelve years before had carried away the seaward face of the house, leaving the other three walls intact up to the edge of the precipice. There was no room to creep round it on either hand. The walls were of massive masonry, the windows boarded up inside the rusty but stout gratings.

Axes, staves and spear-butts beat upon the door. It quivered beneath the blows, splinters flew apace, but the nail-studded oak was built to resist such onslaughts.

Drusus' coachman staggered forward, bearing a mighty boulder. An old cataphract, discharged after twenty years of service, his muscles were still stronger than those of the slaves. The stone, hurled full against the iron lock, shattered it like glass, and flung the door inward against the wooden bars. Again he struck: A bar snapped, and at the third impact, the door fell within.

In rushed the posse. They found themselves in an empty passage leading straight to the cliff-edge and the sky beyond. Moving against the sunlit blue, a rope ran through a block hanging from a projecting ceiling joist and hung down over the cliff.

Peering down, the pursuers saw a strip of beach and a long-boat manned by four rowers, into which two of the ruffians in Nicator's livery were helping two more lift the bound form of Gwenlian. The fifth member of the gang hung halfway down the cliff, lowering himself as fast as he dared let the line run through the block. He turned a frightened face up to the angry eyes above.

"Draw him up!" Tullia ordered.

Willing hands laid hold of the rope, and despite his struggles, hauled the terror-stricken man back over the edge, then flung themselves upon him and beat him with savage fury, laid him out flat, and bound his hands so tightly that he howled in pain. At the sight of his face, Tullia gave an infuriated cry. It was the man with the broken nose.

Staring in hopeless grief over the water, Tullia saw the long-boat pulled swiftly out to a ship lying to in the offing. The boat came alongside, its crew passed their captive aboard and scrambled after. The main-yard swung, the great sail filled. Catching the breeze, the ship bore away majestically to the south-eastward, white water curling at her prow, the long-boat towing astern.

Dry-eyed and sick of heart, Tullia followed the servants homeward. They supported the limping prisoner, with muttered oaths and angry scowls.

DRUSUS, just arrived from the Hall of Justice, met them at the gate. His home-coming had been greeted by an empty house, a trampled garden and an abandoned litter at the gate. The apprehensions these aroused were confirmed by the grief in his cousin's eyes and the appearance of the captured bully.

"What has happened?" he asked.

The servants, afraid, hung their heads. Tullia whispered:

"Gwenlian is abducted."

"Abducted!" His eyes searched hers.

Sadly she told the story, her words interrupted by bitter sobs.

"This is not Nicator's deed," Drusus said. "Nicator has been poisoned and lies between life and death."

"Ventidius—Ventidius has her!" moaned Tullia, feeling herself grow faint at the thought.

"Ventidius is ashes," Drusus told her. "His house was burned to the ground last night, and he trapped within."

"Is it so?" questioned Tullia, her words scarcely audible.

Drusus caught her crumpling form in his arms, and carried her, unconscious, within the house.

CHAPTER XVI

WOLVES OF THE SEA

HE OF the broken nose, pallid and trembling, waited for the doom he read in the dictator's eyes. Well he knew that his offense was not a common felony, but treason against the state in the person of Drusus. Death was the penalty, but how would death come?

"Who bade you do this thing?"

"My master."

"Ventidius?"

"Yes."

"How did he escape? Is he aboard that ship?"

The prisoner looked up, hope stirring in his heart:

"A fair trade, Lord Dictator! Give me my life, and I will tell all."

"Tell all you know, and quickly, if you would have even the choice of your death."

"I tell! I tell!" he cried, urged by the fear of unimaginable tortures. "Ventidius slipped away through the little door beside the nave of the basilica, as soon as he heard the trumpet of the horsemen. He fled to his house, none hindering, for the streets were empty. Gathering his jewels and as much gold as he could carry, he ordered one whom he could trust to fire the house.

"Disguised in a slave-woman's dress and acting the part rarely, Ventidius slipped out of his house and down to the harbor, where he knew the *Cygnus* was to clear for Brittany at dawn. She sailed on the morning tide with him aboard.

"Beware how you lie! That ship was searched by my orders."

"Aye, by soldiers. Her skipper is a master-smuggler: No landsman could find the snug locker hidden beneath his cabin floor. Ventidius owns both captain and ship. Last night he summoned me and my fellows aboard, gave us our orders and these clothes?"

"Where did he get the liveries of Nicator?"

"From a certain Jew who bought them at the sale of Nicator's goods, after Ventidius had let him down from the House Whence None Return. There, as arranged, we bore the princess, while the *Cygnus* lay offshore."

"She is bound for Brittany?"

"Where else?"

There was indeed no other refuge for a British outcast than that wild and lawless new Britain beyond the seas.

"Guard this knave well," ordered Drusus. "Send word to Niall of the Sword and to Prince Meriaduc to meet me at the Flavian Docks."

VENTIDIUS lolled luxuriously on the deep-cushioned cabin locker. The stern-ports were open; but the clean savor of the sea could not penetrate the reek of Spanish incense in the dim-lit cabin. Moving like the swan she was named for, the *Cygnus* breasted the seas with smooth grace.

High-pooped and blunt-bowed, with a single square-rigged mast, triangular topsails and a spritsail upheld by a forward-raking *artemon*—the classic ancestor of both foremast and bowsprit—she was the pick and pride of the Bellerian merchant marine.

"Now!" Ventidius ordered. "But first light the lamps."

The cabin-boy applied a long taper to the wicks of the seven silver lamps that hung from the cabin roof. Their light flooded the snug room, walled with carved and gilded woodwork. The boy went out the door leading to the waist.

Presently two seamen shuffled in, carrying Gwenlian between them. At a sign from Ventidius, they lowered the girl to the floor, unwound the thick scarf that bound and gagged her and went forward. Ventidius promptly rose, locked the door behind them and returned to his couch.

"So you have come back to your desolate husband, sweetheart!" he mocked. "A gentle spouse, and a loving one!"

Gwenlian's eyes looked up into his with loathing. She said no word, but calmly rubbed her cramped arms to restore the flow of blood. Her scorn angered him, roused him to renewed mockery.

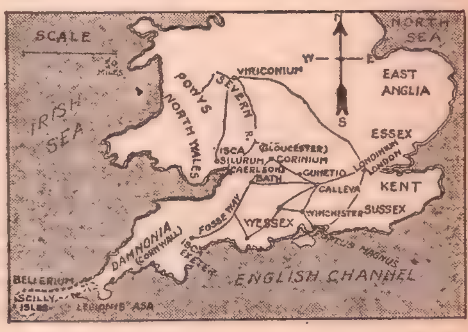
"Little you thought after you cast me off before the multitude, that I was loving and toiling in secret for you!"

"Where are you taking me?" she asked in the voice of one who speaks to a despised inferior.

"To Brittany, my dearest! Where Roman rule is dead, and neither legion nor Saxon longship will come to vex our joy."

The girl had risen, still rubbing her arms. Now suddenly she whirled, flung herself against the door and strove with all her strength to force it open.

His thick lips twisting into a derisive sneer, Ventidius rose from his couch and approached her. The door held. Nearer and nearer the rascal crept, his eyes gleaming with evil joy. Seizing her by one shoulder, he pulled her away and held her to him.



"One kiss before you leave me!" he jeered. "One kiss, sweetheart!"

A dull shock ran through the ship. Wild shouts rang out—shouts of malignant triumph, echoed by the shrieks of stricken men. The clang of arms resounded from the waist. The trampling of many feet beat upon the deck. The steady, swift glide of the *Cygnus* ceased; she wallowed helpless in the trough of the seas.

Ventidius flung the girl from him, unlocked and threw open the door, only to recoil with a cry of terror. Framed in the doorway stood a mail-clad Saxon warrior. His sword dripped blood; blood welled from a gash in his cheek, lending more than usual savagery to his hard face.

With a yell of triumph, the warrior leaped for Ventidius' throat, when a hand reached out from behind him and threw him to the floor.

"Spoil not my vengeance, churl!" a great voice boomed. "Woden has given him into my hands.

Over the prostrate pirate strode a gigantic thane, resplendent in gold-studded mail, his golden beard flowing over an enormous chest. Sweeping Gwenlian aside, he went for Ventidius and knocked the traitor into a far corner of the cabin with a blow of his fist.

Ventidius lay gasping, his little eyes protuding with pain and fear. Too well he knew the Saxon who stood over him, his ruddy face shining with a grin of fiendish delight.

"I have found you, knave!" bellowed the giant. "Little I thought ever to lay hands on your fat carcass! The spirits of my slain comrades will rejoice when I feed you to the sharks."

"Wulfgar!" prayed Ventidius, struggling to one knee.

"Aye, whom ye betrayed, ye lump, with three hundred as lusty lads as ever sailed the sea. Where are they now? Where is my chief, my prince of sea-rovers, Offa Flame-beard? Drinking ale with the gods, thanks to you, you fat, lying Roman! But by Woden? I will give his soul its full of vengeance. I will tear out your entrails, boil you in blood, slice you into crumbs!"

Ventidius thrust out a trembling hand as if to ward off his fate.

"But, good Wulfgar," he protested, "I never betrayed you. What mean you?"

"What mean I?" The Saxon laughed contemptuously. "Did you not send word to Offa that a hundred of your Roman horsemen, riding to the wars, would pass down the Roman road through Cornwall? Did you not urge him to cut them in pieces? And did you not secretly warn these same horsemen of our ambush, that they might fall on us unaware?"

"No, no! No!" screamed Ventidius.

"Aye, by the gods, you did! They burned our ships, cut us to ribbons, turned the few of us they took alive loose in a hostile land, without food or weapons! By ones and twos I saw my comrades hunted down and murdered by the Cornishmen, till I alone, footsore and in tatters, reached the borders of Wessex. In those long, bitter hours of hiding, in the cold rains and gnawing hunger, I swore to comb the seas for you till I found you."

"Hear me, good Wulfgar——"

"And you sail into my hands! Pray to your God, fat one, for tonight you shall see him!"

Kneeling before the pirate, Ventidius whined:

"I swear, by my hope of heaven, that I planned no treason against you! I know not how my enemy learned of your ambush. I thought till this moment he had escaped you without a fight. Nay, spare me! I am innocent!"

For the first time, the Saxon seemed to see Gwenlian and turned to her:

"Innocent, he says! What think you, wench?"

Gwenlian's eyes flamed.

"His hands are as red with British blood as yours," she answered. "He has betrayed his own people, why should he not betray you too?"

"Well spoken!" Wulfgar roared. "Save your breath, dog! Within the hour you shall need it sorely. Nay, hold your lying tongue!"

In desperate case, Ventidius summoned such shreds of courage as he could.

"If you harm me," he warned as he wobbled up from his knees, "you must answer for it to Ceawlin, your king. This girl——"

"This girl," Wulfgar cut him short, "is too rare a prize for you, dog. I will take her myself. She shall pour wine for me in British flagons, while you howl in the —— your priests prate of."

Ventidius was firmly on his feet now, jealous anger almost driving out his fear, his wits working nimbly.

"Touch her not! She goes, as I go, to King Ceawlin. I have secret information for his ear, information that will aid him to wipe out the last stubborn remnant of his foes, and make himself master of Legionis Asa."

"How do I know," the Saxon objected, "that you speak truth? You are a master liar, as I know to my cost."

"If you have spared any of my men," Ventidius answered, "ask them what has happened in Legionis. He whom I bade you ambush in Damnonia is master of the land. He has set a price on my head, driven me into exile. Where should I go, but to Wessex? What is left to me but vengeance? If you kill me, Ceawlin will have you torn limb from limb."

Wulfgar was immersed in the painful task of thought. He did not believe Ventidius, but he knew how well King Ceawlin exploited British traitors.

"I will take you back with me," he decided regretfully, "and put you in the king's hands. But this girl—her I must have. Little value is she to Ceawlin."

Ventidius dared to refuse bluntly:

"She is of as much worth as I. You have

heard of the slaying of Owain, the Welsh king? This is his daughter. It would be madness to offer injury to her. She is more precious than a walled city filled with gold. The North Welsh will make any sacrifice, accept any terms, to have her back unharmed."

"It is a pity," Wulfgar mourned. "She is so fair! She has spirit, too, and would make a rare wife for me." Then his eyes flashed fire again, and he turned on Ventidius. "Aye, your life shall be spared, and the girl shall have honorable treatment. But there is no need of pampering you, you swine! You shall have mouldy food, stale water and kicks! You shall pull the heaviest oar, and be beaten if the swing be not smooth and strong. Out with you!"

TWO bulky hulks, round-bellied, castled at poop and prow, plowed ponderously before a wind that would have borne a lighter craft dancing over the waves. Yet the *Aquila* and the *Boreas* were the fleetest ships next to Ventidius' *Cygnus* out of Bellerium. Descended from the flat-bottomed Gallic coast-wise cogs in which the Veneti fought the galleys of Cæsar, they were designed for stoutness and capacity rather than for speed. To the Roman as to the Celt, the ship was a transport or a floating battlefield, but not a cruiser.

Crowded with fighting men, the two great roundships held toward the Breton coast. The night was clear, though moonless. Hunting for a single craft in those dark waters was a task breeding more despair than hope.

But Drusus knew his quarry could neither beat to windward against the prevailing westerly, nor dared make too much easting for fear of the Saxons along the Dorset shore. Provided Ventidius kept the course for Brittany, the dictator hoped to overhaul him, though the seamen, knowing the speed of the *Cygnus*, shook their heads.

A hail from the *Aquila's* maintop was echoed by a trumpet from the after-castle of the *Boreas*. Across the dark waves, a red glare showed and grew. Too big for any cresset or lantern, that light meant only one thing—a ship on fire.

Drusus ordered out the oars to help the close-hauled sail. With torturing slowness the two cogs crept nearer, till they could make her out. It was indeed the *Cygnus*, her poles bare where Saxon knives had cut the halyards, her castles sheeted in crackling flames.

Simultaneously both ships put off their boats, Drusus and Niall in the sternsheets. A faint, half-strangled cry; the *Aquila's* longboat swerved, and Niall of the Sword reached out a long arm and clutched the shoulder of one who clung to a spar,

They searched the glowing waters for other survivors. The *Cygnus* was aflame from *artemon* to steering oars—no human soul could survive aboard. Niall's heart was torn; his eyes searched the reddened waves for a white face, a woman's floating form, or a drifting garment. But there was nothing here of Gwenlian, in life or in death. The search ceased. The boats withdrew from the circle of intolerable heat, leaving the hulk to burn to the water's edge.

The sailor whom Niall had rescued, being rubbed, wrapped in many blankets, and warmed with a great cup of spiced wine, revived long enough to gasp a few broken words:

"At the end of the first watch—Saxons—boarded—plundered and set us alight."

"What of the Princess Gwenlian?" Drusus demanded, but the man looked blank.

"The girl—the black-haired girl!" prompted the inspired Niall.

"Oh—her! Standing on the pirate's quarter-deck, she was, as they shoved off. Ventidius—howling—the big pirate laying into him with a rope's end."

"Did you hear where they were bound for?"

"West Saxons — heard the word 'Ceawlin'."

"Ceawlin!" Meriaduc, at Niall's shoulder, wailed aloud. "They will take her to Wessex, to be a slave to the heathen!"

"Useless to pursue one of their swift galleys, when it has a two-hour start," groaned Niall. He turned to Drusus:

"What will you do?"

"Put back to Bellerium. It is all we can do. But when the spring comes—then wo to Wessex!"

The despairing eyes of the two Welshmen, tender youth and hardened soldier, strained across the dark waves to the burning *Cygnus*. Meriaduc wept.

"See, Niall," he said, "what comes of my trying to be a soldier! Would that I had not changed back into myself!"

Drusus overheard and thought the boy daft with grief.

CHAPTER XVII

THE BENEVOLENT DESPOT

"HAIL, Nicator!" Drusus greeted the other. "It is good to see you on your feet again. Sit down, while I finish these letters."

"Had I not tasted the poison as I drank, or had the physician been a shade slower with his emetic, I would now be with the shades—I mean the saints."

Nicator was still white and shaken from his long illness. He sank gratefully on the long bench beside the door of the room from which Drusus ruled the land.

It was a large, square chamber on the south side of the old civil basilica, called the Hall of Justice to distinguish it from the Basilica or Church of St. Helena. The floor mosaic was of simple geometrical design; the walls pierced with the usual openings for hypocaust flues to vent their furnace heated air during the winter.

Between the two open windows the wall was pierced with pigeon holes for manuscripts. With his back to these and his face toward whoever entered, Drusus sat in a curule chair, dictating to a secretary whose stylus-point scratched words on wax with amazing neatness and speed. Presently the scribe withdrew, leaving a stack of tablets to be read and sealed.

"But you live, Nicator," Drusus continued the halted conversation, "and can do the state good service. The police have done well in combing the gambling-dens and taverns for idlers who once fattened on the bounty of Ventidius and are now sweating for an honest wage in the shipyards. But there are others, richer parasites, who still think that they need neither work nor fight. Go to them, Nicator, and say: 'Drusus is in earnest!' Do you understand?"

Nicator nodded, rose and started to go. At the door he turned, and asked gravely:

"What will you give me if I prevent any more parents coming to ask that you have their sons made officers?"

"Your weight in gold!"

"Too little!" laughed Nicator as he went out.

Immediately the other door opened and two new visitors entered from the waiting-room. They were wiry little men in close fitting tunics padded at the shoulders and laced round their bodies with leather. Their legs, protected by heavy leathern greaves, were braced apart. They plucked off their round leather caps. Asked one, nervously:

"Is the Circus to be closed, Lord Dictator?"

Drusus nodded:

"The games are over, Crescens, till the war is won."

"It will be the ruin of horse breeding, sir."

Crescens, driver for the blue syndicate, looked sadly at the dictator.

"The army needs you and your horses."

"I hope, sir," said the green-tuniced Diocles, "that the Dictator does not expect us to drive supply wagons. I'd rather be an infantryman!" he finished desperately.

"Have no fear. Tell your fellows, both of you, that such of them as shall have the good fortune and high honor to be present will see you and the other *aurigae* do nobler driving on the battlefield than was ever done in any circus. Within three days, the stables of both syndicates will be moved to the old cavalry stud farm near Castellum Maris."

"Behind the Palisades, sir? Within the Forbidden Zone?"

Like all the rest of Legionis Asa, they had been wondering at what sort of mysterious things the soldiery were doing on those rolling uplands beside the barren North Shore.

Drusus smiled assent, and the two turned to go. Beside the door fearless old Diocles paused.

"May the Dictator pardon me for repeating tavern talk, sir, but if what they say about reviving scythe-armed war chariots is true—then, speaking as a racing driver of twenty-four years' experience, it can't be done in modern warfare, sir."

"Take the crown!" answered Drusus in the words of the judge acclaiming the winner.

The two departed, well pleased, but puzzled.

Next entered a delegation of fishermen, clean Sunday garments on their backs, and discontent in their faces.

"What is the trouble?" the dictator asked in their own dialect.

"That sub-prefect of the new public market!" one of them said.

Another took up the tale:

"He doesn't know scads from soles—never saw a fish away from his own table, by the way he judges the catch."

Drusus replied:

"I have been hearing much the same from the farmers, the poulterers, the market gardeners, and I told them what I now tell you: Select from among yourselves one whom you can trust, and have him meet the sub-prefect here tomorrow at the third hour, when we shall go into these things together. Is that satisfactory?"

It was, and they withdrew.

Carbo, the great mine owner, entered next.

"How can I pay such monstrous war taxes, with all my trade to Aquae and the Severn Valley wiped out, most of my best miners and foundrymen in the army, and all business at a standstill?" he demanded.

"You are clearing a quarter million sesterces a month on your army and shipyard contracts," retorted the dictator, "and Ireland was never so prosperous a customer for you as now. Have you heard how the King of Connaught has vowed to give a chime of bells to every monastery in his dominions?"

"Whence have you that news?"

"From the captain of an Irish trader. Niall of the Sword is his own cousin and vouches for him. It will be hard if you can not get the contract for those bells. You will take payment in horses, of course. Niall is going to Ireland next week for remounts. He can look after both affairs, if you send some one with him who knows bells."

"And you will not forbid me an honest profit on both transactions?" asked Carbo.

"Profit enough for an honest man—to pay his taxes with."

"A great merchant was wasted when you became a soldier," grumbled Carbo, as he moved ponderously out.

Visitor followed visitor, singly or in groups. Rarely had their requests or complaints anything to do directly with the great purpose behind all this tangled jungle of details: The recovery of Britain. During the infrequent pauses, Drusus read and sealed the accumulated letters, or looked through reports handed him by soft stepping secretaries.

The last and most important of the day's callers were the master and three past-masters of the ancient and powerful shipwrights' guild. Unyielding determination was written plain on their foreheads.

"It's bad enough, sir, with all the new yards full of them who weren't born to the craft, and don't know adze from calking iron. We've yielded on that, together with the other guilds," the master wright began. "Time was when a craftsman was a craftsman, but now Bellerium's a madhouse let loose in a tool shop, sir. But when it comes to expecting us to build faster ships than our fathers built, then, saving the Dictator's presence, all I can say is, it can't be done, sir."

The three past-masters, true Britons all, nodded approval. For eight hundred years, their ancestors had built ships of the same unvarying junk-like model, brought perchance by the Phenicians from China to the Cassiterides, and their descendants were destined to build others precisely like them for eight hundred years to come. What the Dictator asked was against all precedent.

Vainly had Drusus shown them the need, brought home to him by his chase of the *Cygnus*, of ships that could both out-race and out-fight the swift Saxon raiders. Realizing his own ignorance, he had sought help where help had most often come to him—from the great text-book of all Roman generals, Caesar's "Gallic War."

But the strategy of the naval campaign against the Veneti gave him no comfort, for now conditions were reversed: The Romans were in the cogs, the barbarians in the galleys. Therefore he turned to a later work, the Commentaries of Carausius.

This he knew to be a forgery, the composition of one of Carausius's lieutenants, who had stolen popularity for his book by attributing it to his great master—the self-made sailor who had forced two emperors to acknowledge him ruler of Britain. But Euphorius, the seaman author, knew ships, and was lavish with his illustrations and designs. Drawn on that yellowed scroll, Drusus had found the plans of the very ship of his dreams. The shipwrights were not at all impressed.

"We don't go by plans and pictures, sir, not in our guild," the master wright had informed him. "We know how each plank and timber is to be shaped and fitted, as has always been, sir. Those drawings look very pretty, but no craft like that could ever be built, sir."

Feeling that he had always misjudged the Emperor Nero, the dictator forbore to command obedience under dire penalties. Instead, he asked:

"Who, then, designed the *Cygnus?*"

"A Greek sculptor, I believe, sir. Ventidius had her built by some of our brethren who were heavily indebted to him. A very irregular business, sir. A freak, that craft was, and look what happened to her!"

A month had passed, and now the master wright was ready to reopen the argument on the old lines. But Drusus clapped his hands thrice, and there entered a slender, curly-haired youth in a long tunic daubed with paint and clay. It was Milo, the sculptor, sprung from those who had come from Hellas in the reign of Constantine. Behind him, borne by two assistants, was a beautiful six-foot model of a dromen of the Carausian navy, complete even to little wax figures of seamen and marines. Turning it about, the port side was shown to be cut away, revealing every rib, brace, and rower's bench, in uttermost detail.

With eyes and finger-tips the shipwrights studied it for twenty minutes, before the master spoke:

"Have ships like this really been built before, sir?"

"Yes, and sailed British seas."

"Then it can be done again, sir, and will be quite all right."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HAMMER AND THE CROSS

"Ceawlin King and Cutha his kinsman,
Dauntless of deeds, destroyers of Britons,
With bold-battling warriors and brave-souled retainers,
Fell on the foemen with flame and with edges,
Struck down three kings and scattered the Welshmen,
Threw down the ramparts like Thor with his hammer,
Ground Owain to pieces with glittering weapons,
And made for the gods, out of moldering corpses,
An altar well-pleasing. Praise to the victor
Who beat down the walls of Bath the well-watered,
Sullied its hot springs, slaughtered the townsfolk,
Humbled forever the hearts of the Britons!
Hail, Ceawlin King and Cutha his kinsman!"

"WOULD Cutha were with us! He delights in praise." The King of Wessex stripped the spiral bracelet from his arm, and tossed it to the bard. "A good song, harper, and a fair reward. I will drink your health. Mead, wenches!"

The thanes at the long tables took up the cry, clamoring for more drink. Half-fuddled already, their garments stained with grease and honey-ale, they yet maintained, in their drunken revelry, the grave dignity of the Saxon.

A pile of gnawed bones stood before each man, to be collected by the serving-women, unless the fumes of the strong mead first incited the warriors to the point of throwing those bones at each other's heads.

The women trooped in, bearing richly ornamented flagons, from which they poured mead into the horns outstretched by the ever thirsty thanes. Guthlac Ironbelly, a huge-shouldered champion by Ceawlin's side, impudently snatched the king's own cup and held it out. The girl who poured spilled half the brew over the thane's shaking fingers. The warriors shouted with laughter. Ceawlin impassively wrested the drinking-horn from Guthlac and flung the contents in his face.

"Let that teach you manners, guzzler!" he chided.

A thane across the table hurled a bone at Guthlac's head, but missed, being over full of mead himself.

At the foot of the table Ventidius, dressed in woolen coat and hose like any Saxon, looked on with sneering lips. Exile among the heathen, much as it had irked his Roman soul, had been good for his body. Two of his chins had disappeared, and the rest of him was hard and almost lean with enforced toil.

Drink only stimulated the fathomless Saxon appetite. Loudly the thanes called for more meat, and the king ordered the women to bring in the crowning delicacy of the feast: Boiled horseflesh, esteemed not so much for its flavor as because the horse was sacred to Woden, chief of the gods.

Shrill laughter echoed from the kitchens—taunting laughter, edged with malice. There was a sound of blows, and a girl ran into the banquet hall, her cheeks glowing with rage. Blue-eyed like the Saxons, she had the black hair and dark beauty of the Welsh.

"Is this the protection you give a hostage, King of the Saxons?" she demanded. "Having slain my father, you turn me into a kitchen-wench, and subject me to the scorn of your lowest waiting-maid!"

The thanes roared with laughter at her fury, and jeered her mercilessly. The one nearest her sprang up, caught her by the shoulder, and tried to force a morsel of horseflesh between her lips. Dashing it aside, she smote him across the mouth. It was an insult not only to her pride, but to her religion, for the Christian who tastes horseflesh has made sacrifice to Woden.

With a bellow of rage, the warrior sprang unsteadily upon her. Ventidus half rose from his seat, but Wulfgar the pirate, by his side, caught his arm in a clutch that bruised the flesh.

Enraged rather than frightened, the Welsh girl struggled with her drunken antagonist. The uproar died down, as the thanes watched with eager interest. The torchlight that revealed the girl's tense features was reflected from polished marble walls, save where the stonework of the ancient Roman palace was blackened by the smoke of a thousand Saxon fires built in the center of its tesselated floor.

Ceawlin beckoned to two enormous churls who guarded the door.

"Put those drunken dogs to bed," he commanded, "and thrust a spear through the next fool who lays hands on the girl."

The order was obeyed with a promptness that testified to both the strength and the sobriety of the churls.

"So ye would make my house into a bear-pit!" The King was on his feet. "Ye would offer insult to a woman who is my hostage, my guest! Aye, my guest, for ye know the sacred privilege of a hostage. Princess Gwenlian, forgive me, if you can not forgive my boors. And tell me, who set you to work in the kitchens? I entrusted you to the care of my queen to be treated with honor."

"It was your queen who made a slave of me," Gwelian answered. "Not the bower but the barn has been my chamber. Instead of honor, I have had jeers and blows."

"Aye, and returned the blows at least!" Ceawlin seemed well pleased. "Well, there will be no more of that. Henceforth you shall be cared for as if you were my own daughter, unless your people reject the terms I offer them."

"What if they do?" she demanded calmly.

"Then your life must pay for their obstinacy. And I must warn you that the time grows short. My envoys should have reached North Wales months ago, for they were sent as soon as Wulfgar brought you to Winchester. If they return not soon, I shall know they have been slain; their blood will cry out for yours. Till then, you shall be safe, and held in honor."

Ventidius sank back beside Wulfgar with a deep feeling of relief. More than all else he had feared that Gwenlian would be given, as part of the spoils of war, to some favored thane.

The heart and will of Ventidius were fixed on two things: The preservation of his own life and the winning of Gwenlian. Neither object was easy. Despised by the humblest Saxon churl, he could win nothing in return for the priceless information he had given Ceawlin but the bare promise that he would not be killed.

As for Gwenlian, Ventidius had neither seen her nor had knowledge of her fate from the time of their arrival in Winchester, the West Saxon capital, until she burst into the hall in the presence of the feasters. Save on the occasions when Ceawlin had sent for him to answer questions about Legionis, Ventidius had herded with the serfs, throughout the long, cold winter.

But tonight he had been taken from the vermin-infested hut where he lodged with four other serfs, had been clad in the dress of a thane, and bidden to the feast.

Ventidius now knew precisely the perils and chances of his own position, and those of Gwenlian's. He was a Briton—for all natives of the island were Britons to the invaders—in Saxon hands; therefore, according to Saxon law, he was a slave. But like any Saxon slave, he could buy his liberty if he could find the price. Gwenlian, as a hostage, ranked as a privileged guest until the failure of Ceawlin's embassy to her people; then her life would be forfeit.

But Ventidius could buy her life as he could buy his own freedom—for a price. Therefore he had saved a price. He had not revealed to Ceawlin all he knew about the strengths and weaknesses of Legionis.

The half-Roman, despising all Saxons as barbarians, underestimated the Saxon king. The renegade's readiness to give information up to a certain point, and his assumption of ignorance once that point was past, deceived Ceawlin not at all. But he said nothing, and at last, by inviting Ventidius to this feast, he did him open honor.

More, for by so doing he recognized Ventidius as the equal of his own thanes, and thereby automatically restored his freedom. Ventidius rejoiced in his heart, for along with the knowledge that he could still sell, he had learned that he would have to pay only for the ransom of one, instead of for two.

THE feast continued deep into the night, till the bard mixed the verses of his songs and driveled off into tipsy nonsense; till half the thanes slid under the tables and the rest sprawled over their own dishes. Only Ceawlin and Ventidius, of all those at the board, were still masters of their senses; Ceawlin because he never drank deep and Ventidius because the rank Saxon mead irked his palate.

"Well, Briton, you are free," Ceawlin remarked casually. "You have what you schemed for: Life and liberty. For these you sold your people, denied your Christ and bowed to our gods. But you wish more, and have withheld from me as much as you have told. What is your price?"

They were as much alone as if the drunken thanes had been so many corpses.

Ventidius's shifty eyes grew bright.

"The price is high, O King!" he answered.

"Ask not too much or I may tear your secrets from you with hot knives!"

"You could not be sure that what I told under torture would be true," Ventidius retorted.

"Therefore I ask your price."

"Give me the Welsh Princess."

Ceawlin was astonished. He had not fully realized the traitor's ambitions.

"You set a high value on a little villainy," he objected.

"But it is a great villainy—and the salvation of your kingdom. Unless I tell you what I know, neither Woden's spear nor the all-crushing hammer of Thor can save you."

Ceawlin's eyes flashed.

"If the gods forsake me, I can save myself," he replied. "But you know well our custom is against what you propose. If the North Welsh refuse to yield to me, or slay my messengers, she dies, according to our law. And if they yield, she, as a hostage, must be honorably returned to them, safe as when she came."

"I know that is the law," Ventidius said. "But you have heard my price; now hear my story. If it is worth what I ask, I will trust you to pay me. Ceawlin of Wessex has the repute of keeping his word."

He searched the countenance of Ceawlin a moment, and continued:

"I have already told you how Drusus, my enemy, hates Saxons so that he risked meeting you and your hosts with a scant hundred horsemen. Now he is dictator—mightier than a king. Ten thousand trained men, horse and foot, await his bidding. What think you that bidding will be?"

"War," answered Ceawlin curtly.

"Aye; and if he makes war, you are doomed. You have never faced heavy-armed Roman horsemen in the field, but Wulfgar has told you what Drusus and his hundred lances did to Offa Flame-beard's three hundred churls. How Drusus will march, not with a squadron, but with an army."

"But he can not break through the line my men have drawn between Cornwall and the Severn, without breaking his legions against Gleawceaster—Glevum, as you call it—and Bath. Giants built those walls."

"Romans built them!" scoffed Ventidius, greatly daring. "Romans, like those who will ride against you! They will storm each city, put your garrisons to the sword—or, more likely, avoid the cities altogether, and march straight through Damnonia. What is more they will be upon you soon. If I know Drusus, he will ride through Devon as soon as the grass is green."

"Through Devon? But that is mine—Saxon from border to border! He will be overwhelmed."

"You will be overwhelmed! How many men of fighting age, armed, equipped and officered, are there in Devon now? Your churls are at home plowing their fields, or else in weak garrisons scattered through a dozen cities. If you wait for Drusus to attack, you wait for death."

"Enough of warning. What have you to tell?"

Ventidius's smile was evil.

"I can tell you how to crush this Drusus and Legionis Asa with him. I can tell you how to make yourself master of this last corner of Roman Britain with its matchless wealth."

"How?"

"Do not wait for Drusus to come to you. Go to him! You can not meet his horsemen in the field; but you can keep him from taking the field at all. Send a great fleet—all the ships you can gather—to invest Bellerium! A feint at Castellum Maris, a night attack at a certain point on the coast, and you can get between him and the unwalled capital.

"Our people are Romans and will act like Romans in the hour of danger. Convinced that Drusus has led them into destruction, they will turn on him. Or if they do not, then let me send word, under cover of darkness, to my paid assassins. One dagger, sheathed in him, will pierce the heart of Legions. He alone inspires the cowardly senators. Once he is dead, they will make any terms."

Ceawlin reflected long.

"It is a good plan," he said at last. "If the North Welsh defy me, I will find a way to hand the girl over to you. But if they accept my terms, since I must then return her unharmed, I will give you instead three thanes' share in the loot of Bellerian. Are you content?"

Ventidius opened his lips to reply, but before the words could form, an armed churl staggered into the hall, half-carried by one of the guard. The man was deathly weary, and his arm, matted with clotted blood, hung by his side.

"Help, O King!" he gasped. "The Britons come!"

Ceawlin leaped to his feet.

"How many? How far? Foot or horse?"

"Glevum—taken!" the churl gasped. "My comrades put to the sword! Brochwel of Powys besieges Bath. A host of horsemen—giants in impenetrable armor—ride on Wessex. I know not how many—I dared not stay to find out. Six horses have I ridden to death——"

"What now, Ventidius," Ceawlin asked, "shall I send that fleet?"

Ventidius was pallid with fear, fear of Drusus who had beaten down Thor's hammer with the Cross of Christ.

"Too late!" he stammered. "Hold fast, here. Call every man to your banners, repair the Roman walls, and pray to your gods as you have never prayed before!"

Ceawlin looked scornfully down upon the coward.

"You pray, if you like! Pray to our gods and to your own; one or the other should hear you. I pray to my sword!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE BATTLE OF THE STONEHENGE

FAST rode the messengers of Ceawlin through Wessex; eagerly thane and churl thronged to the muster at Winchester. But before they were half assembled, the invaders had ridden far into the land.

Instead of marching through Damnonia, Drusus had embarked his entire expeditionary force on most of the newly built fleet, and sailed up the estuary of the Severn. Stealing by night into the unwary port of Gleawceaster, the Romans burst in through the water gate, put the drunken garrison to the sword, and renamed the city Glevum, as of old.

Brochwel of Powys marched in from Caerleon at the head of his joyous levies; down from the North rode Niall of the Sword and Meriaduc, with five hundred new-fledged Ravens: Recruits Niall had brought back with him from Ireland, leavened by Owain's veterans, who had met them in North Wales.

Two Roman roads ran out of the recaptured city, one due south to Aquæ Sulis—now the Saxon city of Bath—and the other southeast to Corinium and Calleva. The region was held by Saxon garrisons in these walled towns. Drusus planned to isolate and crush each of them as he and his allies advanced.

Accordingly he himself advanced on Corinium, despatching Brochwel and Niall to retake Aquæ, march east from there, and meet him where the two Roman roads joined again at the little town of Cunetio.

At every stage of the march, his forces were swelled by revolting serfs—Britons who had been masters of their own lands until the coming of Ceawlin's host the year before. The fall of each Saxon stronghold liberated an entire district. Prepared in advance by spies sent out from Wales, they dug up hidden weapons or sharpened the scythes and hatchets placed in their hands by heathen masters and were ready to join their deliverers as soon as the dust of the advance guard rose upon the wind.

Drusus, advised by Brochwel, counted on just such revolts. The grain in his wagons went untouched, while his troopers feasted on beef brought in on the hoof. The best armed peasants, under Roman drillmasters, garrisoned the recaptured cities.

Most serviceable of all were the unseen host who went before. No Saxon could play the spy—his towering height, fair face and uncouth speech would betray him as far as he could be seen or heard. But the Welsh from across the Severn could and did filter into the Saxon cities from the country round about, passing for the serfs of whatever heathen held those lands.

It was these spies who reported to

Drusus the disposition of the main Saxon forces. Salisbury, at the apex of a right-angled triangle of Roman roads, with Cunetio and Winchester at the acute angles, was held by three thousand under Cutha. Cunetio had been evacuated, its small garrison falling back on the Wessex capital.

Drusus might either advance directly on Winchester, down the hypotenuse of the triangle, and meet Ceawlin's gathering host, or take the longer route along the other two sides, pausing to storm Salisbury on the way.

He chose the latter course, and to keep Ceawlin from reenforcing his nephew Cutha, Drusus ordered Niall and Brochwel to make a demonstration down the Cunetio Winchester road. Crossing Salisbury plain, Drusus unexpectedly came face to face with Cutha's army, within sight of Stonehenge.

Forced outside the walls by an inadequate water supply, Cutha welcomed the chance to give battle in the open. No better battlefield could be found in all Britain than that mighty plain, rolling away on every hand to the far horizon.

At the approach of the Bellerian column, Cutha flung out his bowmen on either flank of his solid shieldwall, drawn up across the road. The day was bright and clear, with a host of tiny clouds flecking the sky; perfect weather for archery.

"Fifteen hundred horse," said Cutha, studying his approaching foes with a warrior's eye; "but what are they doing with those little carts?"

* * *

"THE Seventh Ala will support the attack on the left—the Eighth in front. The Sixth will remain in reserve. Let the *carroballistæ* advance!"

A trumpet sounded, and a cheer went up from the artillerymen. With cracking whips and clattering wheels, the "little carts" sped over the short spring turf to take up their positions four hundred yards from the shieldwall's front and flank.

Each *carroballista* or "cart-catapult" was a huge cross-bow mounted on a light field-carriage drawn by two mules or horses and served by two men. Its likeness can be seen today on Trajan's Column. Most legions of the Middle Empire had a number of these weapons and used them as field artillery. Later, their very existence was forgotten.

But when Drusus first saw a *carroballista* in the vault at Caerleon, its true use had been revealed to him in an instant of inspiration. Being both a hard-riding cavalryman and a hard-headed ballistic expert, he had visualized the creation of a new arm: Horse artillery.

Taken apart and transported carefully by ship and mule-back to Castellum Maris, the specimen found at Caerleon by Erbin, the little son of the Prince of Powys, had been multiplied, teams trained, and personnel drilled, till now six complete batteries were wheeling over Salisbury Plain.

Driver Diocles, late charioteer for the Greens and darling of the Circus, balanced himself with accustomed feet on the narrow platform above the butt of the pole. His team-mate, Marcus the *ballistarius*, sat on the seat which the other held in professional scorn.

"Halt!" sang the trumpets.

Diocles reined in his galloping team. Facing about as he sprang to earth, Marcus ran to the rear of the piece, lowered the hinged trail and spiked it to the ground. Diocles quit his two horses which, contrary to modern practise, were harnessed to a pole projecting from the front of the piece and remained attached to it throughout the action, and was free to help his mate wind up, load, and loose.

"Saints, what a target!" muttered Marcus, squinting along the arrow-trough, and adjusting the prop that held it above the trail, till he was satisfied with both aim and elevation.

Then he and Diocles, facing each other across the trail, seized the long handles of the windlass, and bent back the separated and rigid arms of the crossbow, each bedded in mule-gut springs. To the clinking of the "sow and pig," as the Roman soldiers nicknamed the ratchet and pawl, the stout windlass cord drew the slide back to the rear of the trough, where the trigger caught and held it.

From a loosened sheaf already placed beside him by an arrow-passer, Diocles snatched and laid in the trough a four-foot shaft, its butt fitting neatly into the socket of the slide. Instantly Marcus released the trigger.

A stalwart thane in the front of the Saxon shieldwall opened his mouth in astonishment to see a javelin flying faster and farther than any arrow. He saw that it was curving down directly at himself. Penned in a solid mass of men, he could not avoid it. Even as he raised his shield, the steel-tipped shaft pierced bull-hide and linden-wood, nailing him through the neck to the chest of his rear-rank man.

Not every one of the ranging shots loosed by the other fifty-nine *carroballistæ* was so fearfully effective. Many flew over the Saxons' heads or buried themselves in the turf before their feet. Up and down the two lines of engines rode the battery-commanders, correcting errors, till every machine was on the target. Thereafter the crews had little to do but loose at will. Soon they were averaging six shots a minute.

Forty engines riddled the close-ranked Saxon front; twenty more raked the unshielded flank. Smitten by both storms, the worst sufferers were the archers on Cutha's right. Unable to reply at such long range, they began to run forward by twos and threes. Now the great shafts flew harmless high above them, and they themselves were drawing nearer and nearer to where they could strike back. Their comrades on the left flank joined them, fitting shaft to string as they advanced.

A Roman trumpet sounded. Abruptly the machines ceased loosing, even as another trumpet sang an answer to the first. From their position opposite the right of the Saxon line, the five hundred cataphracts of the Seventh Ala charged boot to boot down on the scattered swarm of startled bowmen.

Few were the Saxons who had time to shoot their arrows or draw their swords before the solid line of lowered points and hammering hoofs rolled resistlessly over them. Before Cutha's astounded spearmen could come to the archers' aid, the Roman cavalry had swept past the front of the shieldwall from flank to flank, and in their wake lay the trampled corpses of four hundred gallant bowmen.

Again the fearsome engines hurled their hurricane of death; the shieldwall reeled, smitten from front to rear. Yells of agony, prayers to the gods, were mingled with roars of raging, helpless men. Loudly they called on Cutha, demanding permission to charge the stinging fiends that slew from afar. Battered as they were, their stubborn courage still held them face to the foe.

Cutha blew his horn, and the shieldwall surged eagerly forward, over the mangled bodies of their fellows. Ignoring the "devil-carts" on their right, they charged straight for those in front. Despite three terrible volleys poured into em at three hundred—two—one hundred yards, the Saxons came on irresistibly, their blue eyes glaring with hate.

Suddenly the *carroballistæ* wheeled, their crews mounting as they turned, and away they clattered to the rear. After them raced the Saxons, intent on catching and cutting to pieces the men and machines that had wrought them such wo. The Wessex men felt their strength redoubled at the sight of the entire Roman army in shameful flight. The cowardly cataphracts were trotting off to right and left without stopping to strike a blow.

For a mile or more the strange chase sped over Salisbury Plain. Yearning for vengeance, each thane and churl ran as fast as his straining muscles could bear him. When at last their panting lungs could endure no more, their once compact formation was strung out far and wide.

And then from right and left and rear, the mailed squadrons turned, charged, and ripped red paths through the loose Saxon array, slaying the scattered heathen with lance and saber.

But Cutha was a champion of champions. At the call of his brazen voice, the thanes drove the wavering churls together. The shields lapped once more, and the rallying warriors formed an irregular square.

Instantly the Roman trumpets pealed again. The disciplined troopers drew off, the returning *carroballisæ* took up positions and the pitiless hail of shafts began.

Slowly the Saxons saw that, whether they charged or stood or fled, they were doomed men. Rested by the interval, their foes whirled the windlasses till the twang of the mighty bowstrings merged in one awful chord. Soldiers with buckets of water ran from engine to engine, cooling the smoking slides.

Back where the battle had begun, details were pulling the shafts from the ground or the dead, laying aside the blunted or broken ones to be dealt with by the smiths, and loading the others into ammunition carts that hastened back to their batteries.

The stubborn shieldwall was melting away like wax before a fire. Drusus saw one or two cast down their weapons, and gladly gave the command:

"Cease loosing!"

Then, as the shaft-storm ceased, he shouted:

"Yield, and I pledge you your lives!"

"I yield," said Cutha, stepping forward as his conqueror rode up. "Your God has become strong, Christian!"

Of the three thousand who had marched out from Salisbury, scarce sixteen hundred remained to be led away under guard to Cunetio.

"Think not to take my city," said Cutha, pointing to the southward, where loomed the mighty mound the Romans called Sorbiodunum, the Saxons Salisbury, and we today Old Sarum.

"Had I obeyed my King, I should have awaited you there. But I knew not that you had harnessed the lightning of Thor. Yet, despite your devil-carts, and though the garrison are few, you cannot take Salisbury."

"Why not?" demanded Drusus.

"Gwenlian, daughter of Owain, is a prisoner there. March back whence you came, Roman, or her severed head will be thrown down to you from the battlements!"

CHAPTER XX

SORBIODUNUM

"OPEN your gates! Open your gates!"

As the cry rang out, Gwenlian raised herself on an elbow, and looked about her with the bewildered eyes of one suddenly roused from sleep. Meriaduc, Tullia, the garden in Bellerium—all she had been dreaming of were vanished and she was back in her Sorbiodunum prison.

The music that had wakened her—was that, too, but a dream? As she wondered and harkened, it came again: The imperious notes of a Roman trumpet sounding the "Summons to Surrender," to which some long-dead legionary had set the words:

"Open your gates! Open your gates!"

Drawing on her Saxon shoes of soft leather, Gwenlian started toward the barred window that made this, like most other Roman bedrooms, readily available as a cell. But before she reached it, the door was noisily unbarred and opened. Into the room, panting as if he had run all the way from the city gate, strode a grim-eyed thane with long white moustaches: Oslaf the Old, whom Cutha had left in command of Sorbiodunum.

Without a word, he bound Gwenlian's wrists together and thrust her before him out of the room, out of the building, and down the street. As the two passed along, dark faces peered furtively out from wattled huts and ruinous Roman dwellings. Suddenly ten or a dozen ragged British serfs rushed at them out of an alley, with a rescue of the princess in mind, only to turn and run back again at the approach of a knot of Saxon spearmen, who flew into a rage at the sight of Gwenlian.

"Kill the Welsh woman!" howled the biggest churl. "Hew her head from her shoulders!"

"Touch her not, ye lack-wits!" thundered Oslaf, whipping out his sword and covering her with his shield. "If she be slain or rescued, our lives are forfeit. Follow, and guard her to the battlements!"

The thane's authority cowed the rude savagery of the churls. They trudged after him and his prisoner, down the street and up a grass-grown ramp to the platform of the city wall. Picking Gwenlian up like a child, Oslaf placed her on the broad top of the parapet, where she could see and be seen by all below.

What she saw was long lines of horsemen drawn up at the foot of Sorbiodunum Hill, their scale-armor red with Saxon blood. Then she saw Drusus and Nial riding toward her alone. Straight up the steep slope they spurred, heedless of the risk of stones and arrows from the wall, till they reined in on the very brink of the dry moat.

But now Oslaf the Old sprang up beside her, grasped the thick braids of her hair in one hand, and held his sword ready in the other.

"Back, Christian curs!" he shouted. "Leave us in peace, or I cast the head of Owain's daughter at your feet!"

"Shed but one drop of her blood," Drusus answered, "and I will send you all howling to ——."

The thane's sword circled, high above Gwenlian's head. "Back!" he repeated. "Back, or she dies!"

Gwenlian smiled up at him disdainfully, then looked down and met the tortured gaze of Niall; an instant they lingered on the Raven, then her gaze passed on to Drusus:

"On, Roman!" she cried. "Think not of me! For Britain's sake, for Christ and your country, storm!"

Oslaf struck her across the mouth with the knuckles of his sword-hand, then raised the long blade as if to strike. But Drusus stopped him with an imperious gesture.

"We will make terms with you," he declared, and made a sign to the ranks below.

Three horsemen at once rode up and halted beside the dictator. Two were troopers. Between them, bound and crestfallen, the captive Cutha sat his horse.

"Look down!" called Drusus to the thane. "Behold your prince, your ring-giver, taken in fight. How shall you face your king, how pray to your false gods, with his blood on your heads? If the least of harm befalls Owain's daughter, I will slay Cutha before your eyes."

A hundred anxious faces looked down from the battlements. Loud were the wails of grief at the sight of their vanquished leader. Cutha, the conqueror, was a fettered prisoner! His head was bowed in shame—a British sword pricked his throat. One and all they besought Oslaf to yield, give up the captive and save the prince's life.

The old warrior threw his sword over the battlements.

"What terms do ye offer?" he asked. "Be merciful, Christian! We be beaten men, beaten without the soldier's joy of a well-fought fight."

"Fair terms," Drusus answered. "Ye shall throw open your gates, lead out the Lady Gwenlian to me, admit my soldiers, and receive your prince alive and free. Then shall ye all march out, without your weapons, and depart for Winchester. All, that is, save you, fellow, who dared to strike a British princess. Your life will pay for the blow. Do ye accept?"

Oslaf smiled bitterly. "I fear not to choose death for the sake of my people, as this Welsh girl feared not my sword. It shall not be said that a woman of the Britons dared more than a Saxon thane. We accept!"

The churls, feeling the shadow of death lifted from them, hastened to open the gates. Over the lowered drawbridge Oslaf led Gwenlian, as Drusus rode up and dismounted. Beside him Cutha, freed from his bonds sprang down from his own horse. But Gwenlian's wrists were still tied tightly together with a rawhide thong.

"Why have you not unbound her?" Drusus demanded.

"I do so even now," the thane Oslaf answered.

Drawing his dagger, he cut her bonds, then thrust the knife into his own breast and fell at her feet.

"I have paid the forfeit," he gasped, and died.

Drusus looked down at the corpse with troubled eyes.

"I had not meant this," he said sorrowfully. "After his brave answer, I had thought to pardon him. But—" The city gates had clanged shut in his very face. "What, in the fiend's name!"

The drawbridge was rising! He and Niall stood outside the wall with Gwenlian and the two troopers who had guarded Cutha. Now Cutha was in the city. At any moment his archers might shoot down on the little group so near the loop-holes of the gate towers.

"Treachery!" breathed Drusus in a tense whisper to Niall. Turning to the nearest trooper: "Bid them attack at once!" he ordered; to the other trooper, as the first wheeled and dashed off, he added:

"Take the Princess to the rear!"

From behind the walls, oaths, screams and blows rang out from street and gatehouse and rampart. It sounded like a battle of lost souls for air in Hell.

Niall and Drusus fell to their knees for greater safety. Behind them they could hear the legions come roaring up the hill: Evidently Capito had not waited for the orderly.

Glancing up from where he knelt, Drusus saw a struggling man thrown bodily down from the wall into the dry moat. A second followed, and a third. Soon it seemed to be raining dead men, mixed with those who were only wounded, who writhed and groaned in the agony of their fall. The moat was a pit of death and torment.

The tumult ceased as abruptly as it had begun, leaving a silence upon which the dying wail of a single victim shrilled piteously. Lights twinkled upon the walls Then, as the head of the column of cataphracts pounded up, the drawbridge fell and the gates flew open before the astounded Romans.

Out from the city poured a shouting

throng of swarthy men and women, a hundred torches illuminating their ragged dignity.

"Hail, Liberator!" cried their leader, a bull-necked British serf, his glowing face raised to Drusus. "We, who have been slaves, salute you! Not a Saxon lives in Sorbiodunum. Behold the trophy of our victory!"

High on his spear he held a grinning horror—the severed head of Cutha.

CHAPTER XXI

THE COUNTER-STROKE

"TOMORROW we shall begin to batter in the West Gate and the old patched-up breach between it and the southwest angle," said Drusus.

"That was where Cerdic, the grandsire of Ceawlin, entered into Winchester after the Britons were beaten in the woful battle when Aurelius Ambrosius fell by the shore of Portus Magnus," observed Brochwel of Powys. "So began the Kingdom of Wessex."

"And so it comes to an end," added Niall with deep satisfaction. "Not a foot of his realm has its king left to call his own, outside the circuit of his city walls. I never hoped to see the day when the Saxons feared to face us in the open field."

The three looked down over their great camp, ditched and palisaded in true Roman style, to where the busy engineers were setting up and emplacing the last of a mighty battery of catapults, far heavier than the handly little *carroballistae*. With a few hundred pounds of rope, mule-gut and iron-mongery, the heaviest siege-engines could be quickly built of timber cut and fitted on the spot.

Between the rear of the battery and the cavalry lines dust rose from the awkward feet of British levies, being drilled by hard-swearing Bellerian centurions. Other dust-clouds approaching over the open plain on all sides of the compact, four-square city, told of fresh recruits or new herds of sheep and oxen being brought in. Not a Saxon dared show himself outside the walls of Winchester.

Far down the road that ran along the bank of the Itchen southward to the Portus Magnus the sunlight caught the lance-points of a patrol of cataphracts coming on toward Winchester.

"They ride like men who bring news," observed Drusus. "Something of note has happened at the port."

"The saints grant it be not Ethelbert of Kent and a ship-army of his Jutes landing to march against us," prayed Brochwel.

"Little aid will Ceawlin get from the Kentishmen," laughed Niall.

"Why?"

"Here comes my princess—she knows."

Beside the plain headquarters tent of war-stained leather stood a gay pavillion, its sides embroidered in many colors, its poles topped with fluttering pennons. Guarded by gallant Ravens and attended by maidens and matrons of high degree, new-rescued from the heathen and fittingly garbed once more, Gwenlian came forth.

No longer did she wear the coarse gray homespun of a Saxon slave, but the splendid robes of a princess of North Wales. A slender circlet of gold in her dark hair attested her rank. Meriaduc was with her. He had been sent to bring her to the council-table.

Rising and bowing low, the three commanders attended her to a seat at the table. Meriaduc chose to sit opposite her, his eyes gay once more as he looked on her splendor.

"Tell them, Princess, why Kent will not march to succor Wessex," old Niall urged.

"Because Ceawlin and Cutha once invaded and plundered Kent, fought against Ethelbert and slew two of his aldermen," she answered. "Often of late have I listened while Ceawlin and his thanes talked of this and other matters over the mead I poured for them."

"But surely they spoke in Saxon?" objected Brochwel.

"We of the northern border have some knowledge of that tongue. Again I harkened to the complaints of the South and East Saxons against the inroads of Wulfgar and other pirates whom Ceawlin protects, heard his scornful reply and the angry mutterings of the envoys as they left the hall. Ceawlin stands and will fall alone."

"He lies like a nut beneath the hammer," exulted Meriaduc. "When our forces have taken Winchester, the heathen hold on South Britain will be broken forever."

He paused, suddenly grave.

Niall of the Sword took up his speech.

"Next year—" he saluted his prince—"will see you acknowledged king of North Wales. Within three more," he saluted

Drusus—"London will acclaim the Emperor of Britain."

"In the meanwhile," said Drusus quietly, "we have not yet taken Winchester. What is it, Decurion?"

The commander of the patrol stood in the entrance of the headquarters tent. Beside him was an unarmed Briton, a little old serf whose dark eyes burned with excitement.

"Lord Dictator," reported the decurion, "my patrol met this man, ten miles north of Portus Magnus, with a dozen mounted Saxons hard on his horse's heels. They rode into us blindly, and were put to the sword before I could save one alive. Having heard this man's story, I brought him hither with all speed."

The serf threw himself at the feet of Drusus, crying:

"Vengeance, O Champion of Britain! Vengeance for the murder of my children!"

"Who has killed them?"

"Ceawlin the King! In his hall he sat, drinking with his thanes, when out of the night came a naked man, red with the caked blood of his many wounds. It was Edwin, a thane of Cutha's, stripped and left for dead on the battlefield, yet who lived to reach his king and tell him of the battle. Straightway they held council together. And that no one, O Liberator, might bring you word of what they planned to do, Ceawlin first ordered that the gates be closed and guarded, and then that every Briton in Winchester be slain."

A cry of horror went round the council-table. Niall of the Sword was the first to find speech:

"Sound the assault!" he shouted. "Storm the walls and cut all within to pieces!"

"Wait!" Drusus ordered. "Was this thing done?"

"Even as commanded," sobbed the old man. "My three tall sons—their wives—their little children were among those who died that red night. Not one Christian lives in Gaer Gwent," he concluded, giving Winchester its Celtic name.

"How did you learn this and escape to tell it?"

"The thane whose churls guarded us, as we bore the Saxon gear aboard their galleys at Portus Magnus, drank deep and boasted loudly that when the king led his host from Winchester, he left no tale bearers behind."

"Ceawlin and his army not in Winchester!" exclaimed Drusus.

The old serf met the astounded and suspecting eyes of all unfalteringly.

"I myself saw him by the shore, attended by his thanes. He seemed well pleased, and laughed with the base apostate Roman whom he keeps by him."

Ventidius!" hissed Niall. "The tale rings true."

"How many men has Ceawlin in Portus Magnus?" Drusus asked.

"Ceawlin is there no longer. This morning he embarked with wellnigh all his host and put out to sea. Fearing another massacre, I stole a horse and fled."

"By St. Peter the Swordsman!" shouted Capito, who had entered and listened. "The heathen dogs have given up the game, and flee back to their kennels on the Baltic."

Drusus pondered.

"It may be so. But I had not thought they would give up so easily."

Meriaduc sprang to his feet.

"They never give up!" he affirmed. "You do not know—even you, Drusus—how stubborn the Saxons are. They will not abandon the homes they have dwelt in for more than a hundred years. It is a trick."

"How do we know the whole story is not a trick?" asked Borchwel.

"This much I know to be true," said the decurion. "From a hilltop, I and my troopers saw the white sails of four-score Saxon ships, steering westward past the Isle of Vectis."

"Their homeland lies east," insisted Meriaduc.

Gwenlian was on her feet, asking to be heard.

"I remember," she said, "the words of Ceawlin to Ventidius, just before I was taken to Sorbiodunum. The traitor urged the king to move against Bellerium by sea, but Ceawlin refused, thinking he could crush you in the field. Now that they have taken ship together and sail west, there can be no doubt but that Ventidius has prevailed. Beaten in open battle, the Saxons have but one hope: To overwhelm Legionis Asa in your absence."

"You should have been a man and a soldier!" Drusus complimented her. None observed Meriaduc sigh at the dictator's words. "I thought only of the high courage of Ceawlin and had forgotten the low cunning of the renegade.

"Capito, order the Sixth Ala to prepare to march. To you, Prince of Powys, I entrust the siege. Proceed with the bombardment. Since there are none of our people left alive in the city, do not scruple to use fire-arrows. When you have taken the city, repair the walls and wait till I return."

The Welshman expressed doubt.

"Though you left me every man, yet yourself abandoned me, I should be hard put to it," he protested. " 'Tis the brain and soul of Drusus has won our victories. I will do my best, but forget not that the south and east swarm with hard-fighting heathen, hungry for revenge. Fail me not, but return—and the saints ride with you!"

Wringing the old warrior's hand, Drusus turned to say farewell to Niall and the princes of North Wales. They had left the tent.

"They also would ride with you," said Brochwel, "and I think they will."

CHAPTER XXII

OFF BELLERIUM

"LET go your anchors!"

Thirty mooring-stones were dropped from as many bows. The galleys of Wulfgar the Rover blocked the narrow entrance to the harbor of Bellerium.

Like the head of a snake with an undershot jaw was the shape of the western end of Legionis Asa. The estuary was the serpent's mouth; the Ictis promontory its tongue. So striking was the likeness to any one standing on the top of St. Mary's Mount that the long, narrow headland, jutting out from the end of the opposite shore and all but closing the mouth, had been called The Fang.

Between the tip of the Fang and the northern side of St. Mary's Mount, every foot of the narrow entrance channel could be reached by the stones and darts of the powerful batteries of catapults in the forts that crowned the wave-washed cliffs on either hand.

More engines commanded the narrow rock-cut paths and ramps leading down the western side of the Mount to The Sands: The broad, rounded point of dune and shingle that tipped the serpent's chin. There two full cohorts of Bellerian infantry supported a score of light catapults brought down in pieces from the Mount and set up at the water's edge.

Wulfgar had anchored his squadron well out of range.

"Let him who will thrust his witless head into the dragon's mouth," he said to the mate of his flagship, the *White Horse.* "I saw enough of such fool's work yesternight."

The great fleet of Wessex, following the shore by day and drawn up on the beach at night, had found itself off Castellum Maris by late afternoon of the third day out from Portum Magnus. Warned by Ventidius that Castellum Maris was impregnable, Ceawlin had disembarked and encamped his men at the Cornish end of the sandy peninsula that linked Legionis Asa to Cornwall.

But his sentries had drunk too deep of the mead-casks. A daring night attack by two hundred and fifty well-handled legionaries set four Saxon ships ablaze, cut their crews to pieces, and withdrew before the bewildered camp could spring to arms. Furiously pursuing, the Wessex men were drawn under the catapults of the fort, as their foes had planned, at moon-rise, and suffered greviously before their king could force them to withdraw.

When morning came, there was much to be done before the main fleet could proceed. So Ceawlin ordered Wulfgar to take thirty ships and speed down the coast of the Legionis to Bellerium. Wulfgar was pleased.

"We should catch fat fish on these grounds, Eadric," he said to his mate, as they lay at anchor.

Eadric, a literal-minded Saxon with a taste for broiled pollock, grinned and took his hand-line out of a locker. Wulfgar burst into a derisive guffaw that startled the seagulls.

"Not such do I mean, Eadric Emptyskull, but—*that!*"

Past the cape, two miles to the northward, where the sloping forehead of the snake's head ended in the granite roots of the Fang, came a west-bound Bellerian roundship under full sail. Little need had Wulfgar to shout commands: Already every Saxon crew was racing to get up anchor and be the first to reach the prize. Another roundship appeared astern of the first, then a third, a fourth, a fifth.

"There will be much plunder and a little fighting," said Eadric with simple satisfaction as he felt the edge of his axe.

"Their skippers are fools, even for Romans," answered Wulfgar. "They make us a gift of the weather-gage. We will make their fat backs bristle with arrows, then run in and cut their throats."

Not till they were fully a mile offshore did the Bellerian squadron come about and, still in line-ahead, sail with a "soldiers' wind" southward to meet their swarming foes. The thirty Saxon galleys, under bare poles and guiltless of formation, raced northward till most of them were abreast of the Romans and between them and the Fang.

As each long, graceful galley met and passed one of the ponderous cogs, the Saxon archers in the "rooms" or spaces between the rowers' benches bent their bows and sent a storm of arrows whistling down the wind. But the few Christians to be seen on deck wore helmets and scale-mail, the helmsmen were sheltered in little turrets built above the steering paddles, and, as a further protection, great square shields had been raised above the bulwarks. There was one of these erections on either side of the high poop, another on the forecastle, and four in the waist of each Bellerian.

"Save your shafts, lads!" shouted Wulfgar contemptuously. "Lay us alongside their flagship, Eadric, and make an end."

Straight for the leading cog sped the *White Horse* as fast as thirty oars could drive her over the rolling seas. Suddenly, from the center of each of the six shields on the roundship's broadside darted something black. Great fountains of spray spouted beside the galley as she dipped down the slope of the wave. Two of the mysterious missiles swooped down into the undecked, uptilted hull and smashed great jagged holes through the bottom.

By the time she reached the trough, the Saxon ship was half full of water. Sluggishly she rose on the crest of the next wave, and hung there, her frantic crew outlined against the sky as they baled with their helmets, stripped off their mail-shirts or called upon their gods. Higher and higher reared the *White Horse's* proud figurehead, as she sank back into the trough, never to reappear.

Horror and dismay fell on the Saxon fleet. Sea-fighting they knew—none better; but this was black magic of the blackest. Their nerves shaken by the events of the night before and the thousand rumors current in Wessex about the overthrow of Cutha, the pirates cried to each other that the arch-magician Drusus was on board the Christian fleet.

Each of the five cogs was now loosing well-aimed broadsides at every Saxon ship that tried to close and board. For centuries such vessels and such artillery had existed side by side, till the genius of Drusus brought them together.

Massively framed and strongly braced, the roundships easily endured the recoil of the light ballistae mounted on tripods behind the bulwarks. Identical in pattern above the carriage with those of the horse artillery, each great cross-bow had its upright frame covered to make a shield, to protect the crew from arrows during action.

Instead of the long, light man killing shafts that had riddled the shieldwall, Drusus had devised for naval warfare a short, thick bolt with a heavy head, that splintered and shattered the side of a ship.

Expecting to encounter some, if not all, of Ceawlin's fleet off Bellerium, he had daringly divided his own ten ships into two separate squadrons. The second of these now rounded the point and sailed southward, like the first, in line ahead, between the Saxons and the breakers that foamed at the foot of the Fang.

Caught between the two Bellerian squadrons and pounded from both sides, seven more heathen craft were battered till they sank. The rest, leaderless, bewildered, but loth to flee, rowed about aimlessly, discharging futile arrows, and ever being forced back nearer and nearer to the Sands and the harbor mouth.

Then from the fore-deck of the *Freya* rang a heartening shout. There stood Wulfgar, dripping from the sea. Mail-clad though he was, the Rover had swum to safety. Moreover, he had thought as he swam, and now he proclaimed the way to victory.

"Bear down on their bows and sterns!" he bellowed. "Ye have thrice the speed of those tubs. They can spit their hammer-heads to port and starboard, but not fore and aft. 'Ware broadsides. Meet or pursue, then run alongside and board!"

As he spoke, the *Freya* darted for the bluff bows of the nearest Bellerian. Before the clumsy cog could come about and bring her engines to bear, the galley was safe alongside, where the ballistae could not be depressed to sink her. Grapnels were thrown. The boarders sprang for the chains and swarmed up over the rail.

Wulfgar was the first to leap down on the roundship's deck. With two blows of his terrible ax, he clove the skulls of the nearest catapult crew; with a third, he split the machine asunder.

"Woden is with us!" he exulted.

But up from the main hatch and out of the forecastle and cabin doors came a charging throng of gallant fighters in sable armor. Unwittingly, Wulfgar had boarded the ship that bore Gwenlian and her guard of fifty picked Ravens.

Luckily for the landsmen, the voyage had been long enough for them to recover from sea-sickness before now. A bit uncertain of their sea-legs, but not of their sword-arms, the Irish troopers met the Saxon pirates halfway, and a fierce battle raged in the waist.

"On, men of Wessex!" shouted Wulfgar, hard-pressed by Niall of the Sword. "Ceawlin's fleet will soon be here!"

Niall had detailed Meriaduc to remain with his sister, as her last defense, if such need should come.

Other galleys succeeded in closing with their foes. But on each cog the soldiers and seamen fought stubbornly with the swarming rovers. A slight reinforcement would bring victory to either side.

"Fifty heathen ships will be here within the hour!" panted a decurion who had dashed down from the top of St. Mary's Mount to Hastator, commanding the cohorts on the Sands.

"Better one in season than fifty who come too late," answered the veteran. "Look yonder!"

Out of the harbor mouth came the ship Euphorius had drawn and Milo modeled: a great war-galley fit for the admiral of an old-time Roman fleet.

Taller than any roundship, swifter and more graceful than the heathen craft, she swept into the fight with smoothly beating oars and swelling sails. A mighty ballista twanged on her square, battlemented forecastle, hurling a steel-tipped beam that broke the back of a Wessex galley.

Two massive timbers projected forward from the newcomer's onrushing bows. The lower and longer bore the head of a giant spear; the upper, that of a ram. Backed by irresistible weight and speed, the spear-point pierced the side of a Saxon ship just above the waterline, the ram's head widened the breach and freed the point for withdrawal.

A thane who succeeded in bringing his galley alongside the great Roman ship found himself beneath an overhanging gallery lined with marines who rained down darts and sword-strokes on the boarders. And, more numerous and powerful than those of any cog, her engines hurled destruction on all sides.

"Gods, what a ship!" gasped Wulfgar as the splendid vessel swept past.

But he who fought with Niall of the Sword and let his eye and brain wander for ever so brief an instant, made that instant his last. The swift Irish blade whipped round the guarding ax-head and shore through the Saxon's neck.

Back to their galley fled his beaten crew, glad of the chance to push off and pull for the open sea. With them sped the other survivors of the Saxon squadron: Twelve ships in all.

A signal fluttered from the Roman flagship and the great galley reluctantly ceased to pursue.

"We can not risk the loss of the *St. Michael*," Drusus said to his fleet-captain. "When we have more like her, we shall take Portus Magnus, restore the old naval base there, and from it begin the sweeping of the seas. Now is the time for us to work our way into the harbor before the turn of the tide. But first send a boat ashore with orders to Hastator to withdraw his men and machines to the Mount. They are too few to hold the Sands against the full strength of Ceawlin's fleet."

With the *St. Michael* proudly bringing up the rear, the squadron passed through the narrow entrance and up the broad estuary to the Flavian Docks. The word of their triumph had flown from the watchers on the Mount to the anxious ears of all Belerium. Then did a most joyous procession, singing and shouting, chanting and cheering, headed by Bishop Ambrosius and other notables,

> "Like to the senators of the antique Rome,
> With the plebians swarming at their heels,
> Go forth and fetch their conquering Cæsar in."

CHAPTER XXIII

THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER

LOUD rose the tumult of drunken song from the Saxon camp on the Sands, the song of men who feast in anticipation of victory. The raucous voices drifted upward against the dying wind to the silent soldiers on the Mount. The ballista crews lay by their engines, grimly reckoning the toll they would take of the shieldwall on the morrow.

The sentries' calls echoed back and forth through the dark. Willing gangs of laborers deepened the ditches and heightened the ramparts under the direction of military engineers.

Far below gleamed the wavering red reflections of the tar-fed cressets blazing on the armed cogs and guard boats behind the boom that closed the harbor mouth. Let the enemy fleet try to burst through under cover of darkness; at once great fire-rafts would flame up revealing every plank of the heathen craft to the artillerymen on the heights above.

Silent and unseen, behind the screen of their camp-fires, lines of armed men in Saxon mail crept down to the edge of the Sands. While their companions sang, the bulk of the Saxon host stole down to the beach, shoved out the snake-necked galleys, and clambered aboard. One by one, the longships glided out to sea, unperceived, while the churls left behind dutifully, gleefully, raised their voices higher and higher over the mead-horns.

With muffled oars, the great fleet pulled past the length of the Fag and rounded the cape that marked the beginning of the northern coast of Legionis. Not till then did they raise the stroke and shoot swiftly toward the eastward.

Wrapped in their sea-cloaks, Ceawlin and Ventidius stood on the fore-deck of the *Black Serpent*, striving to pierce the darkness with their straining eyes.

"You can find it in the dark? It is a hard task for a landsman." Ceawlin's voice was anxious. "I have had enough of those fearsome flying boulders and ships that spew tree-trunks."

"Never fear!" the traitor reassured him. "Landsman or not, I have often steered my own ship to this very spot, when I was younger. I could find it in my sleep."

More slowly now, the half-naked oarsmen eased the long galleys inshore and along the cliffs that loomed to port like the walls of spectral cities. Presently a word from Ventidius sent a seaman to the masthead with a flaming torch. Gently the *Black Serpent* was eased to the shore.

Ventidius passed an order aft to the helmsman, who strained mightily at the steering gear. Suddenly the grate of shingle under the stem-post told of a safe landing. A mighty crag overhung her starboard rail, as if about to fall and crush her to atoms. But her forefoot rested easily on a broad beach that existed only at low tide.

"All is well!" Ventidius told the king. "But the ships must shove off and lie at anchor once your warriors are disembarked, or the flood-tide will lift them and crash them against the cliffs."

A second galley came up on the port side, kissing the wet sand; a third, a fourth, and many more, till the great war-fleet rested snugly and in order. It was Saxon seamanship at its best.

With little sound, save the jingle of chain-mail, all but a few from each ship dropped down or waded to the beach. The tideland, running well out for more than a mile along the crags, was soon lined with companies of impatient warriors, restive under the strain of enforced silence.

"Lead on," said Ceawlin in a deep whisper to Ventidius, "and lead us aright, if you would see tomorrow's sun."

"Follow me," answered the renegade calmly.

Leaving the host and the ships behind, the king and a dozen of his trustiest thanes trod close in the Roman's footsteps as he went diagonally up the beach to the base of the cliff. There his sandals no longer sank noiselessly into the sand but scuffed on rock.

"Turn to the left," he whispered, "and up the slope. It is wide enough for two armed men abreast, if the one on the right keeps close enough to the wall."

It was a sloping ledge, a natural ramp of living granite, carved by the sea in bold relief against the face of the cliff. Up and up they mounted. Then at a stride, beach and sea and the low white line of surf vanished into thick darkness. Ceawlin tightened his grip on his guide's arm and loosened his dagger in its sheath.

"Strike flint and light the torch," spoke the voice of Ventidius.

Steel clinked on flint, sparks flew, tinder glowed—then abruptly a resined torch caught and burned with a high, clear flame. Its light fell on an out-jutting mass of granite that screened the top of the ledge and a narrow opening that led to unseen depths within. It was well hidden; by day or by night that cave mouth would be invisible from sea or land, even though a hundred camp fires blazed therein.

More confidently the Saxons followed Ventidius over the sandy floor of the cave, till its sides drew together and the clean salt air became close and musty. He stopped and pointed to the marks of wedge and pick on either wall. The way before them had been hewn by the hands of men.

"Here the sea cave ends," Ventidius explained. "This opening leads into an ancient mine, abandoned long ago, when the miners followed the vein to its end, and hearing the rock ring hollow to their blows, broke through and found this. I learned of it from one of the ancient folk, sprung from those vanished miners. Knowing my interest in the smuggling trade with Brittany, he sold me the secret, and soon afterward died of a sudden sickness."

The traitor laughed softly.

They climbed the corkscrew twists and bends of the worked-out vein, till it seemed that the surface of the earth must be very near.

Abruptly the way was stopped by a strange barrier: A neatly stacked pile of tall, narrow Roman wine casks. A shelf cut out of the rock beside them held flint and steel, an oil jar, and several stone miner's lamps of ancient pattern.

Ventidius stooped and released a catch. Instantly the whole mass of casks and the wooden platform they stood on swung silently to one side. Striding through, Ceawlin found himself in the vaulted cellar of a large building.

"My villa," Ventidius answered the unspoken question. "It is doubtless watched, but after so long a time the police will have relaxed their vigilance. Follow me silently and with drawn swords."

The shadows held no lurking forms. A broad stone stairway led to the floor above. The door at the top resisted, but a thrust of a shoulder burst it open. It was not locked; sealed by order of the Senate, it had swelled in the moisture of the spring rains.

"Stop!" hissed Ceawlin. "What is that?"

A strange and horrible sound reverberated through the villa. Ventidius tried to think what those unearthly roarings and gurglings could be. A few seconds more of suspense and the Saxons, ever suspicious of a trap, would end his doubts with a knife-thrust. At the last instant before Ceawlin would have struck, Ventidius remembered.

"Snoring!" he gasped.

Irrepressible laughter burst from the king and his thanes. The grotesque reaction was too much for their simple barbaric minds. That they had been on the point of mistakenly cutting Ventidius's throat only made the jest more to their liking.

Rushing into the dusty atrium, they found a solitary watchman sitting up on the cushioned couch where he had been sleeping, his staff and an empty wine pitcher on the floor beside him. His fat cheeks paled beneath a four-days' beard, as his bloodshot eyes blinked up at the grinning giants in heathen armor.

"What force is there north of the estuary?" demanded Ventidius.

The watchman only stared in astonishment at the not-too-fat, black-bearded outlander who spoke Latin like a born Berlerian.

"Speak British!" Ceawlin ordered. "I can not understand this pig's talk."

Ventidius repeated the question as directed, and the trembling wretch answered readily:

"The city is under arms, but there are no troops this side of the harbor—all on the Mount."

"Is the bridge guarded?"

"No."

The traitor looked at Ceawlin in triumph.

"Put this drunken churl to death," commanded the Saxon king. "Let the ships be shoved off and anchored, and the host brought up through the cave. At sunrise we storm Bellerium!"

CHAPTER XXIV

HAND TO HAND

"GONE!" exclaimed Hastator as the first rays of the rising sun lighted up the deserted, keel-marked Sands.

"To the North," answered Drusus, standing beside him on St. Mary's Mount and pointing to where two Saxon galleys were rounding the base of the Fang.

It was the crews of these galleys who had sung so lustily and kept the camp-fires burning. Now they were eastbound along the northern shore, with a well-worked out appearance of being in the wake of the main fleet.

"They must plan to recapture Glevum,"

hazarded Hastator, "and take Capito in the rear and unaware."

But Drusus's eyes had left the departing galleys and were gazing in quite another direction.

"It is we who are taken in the rear and unaware," he said solemnly. "Look yonder, across the harbor!"

Around the base of the hill that hid Ventidius's villa from the watchers on the Mount wound a long column of marching men-at-arms. Spear-heads and helmets flashed in the dawn, like the back-scales of a monstrous, crawling snake. Despite the mighty ramparts reared by God and man, the Serpent had entered Eden.

"To horse!" commanded Drusus in a voice that rang through the bivouac. "Mounted men, follow me!"

He did not wait for further speech with Hastator. He knew that his lieutenant would assemble the three cohorts on the Mount and lead them down through the city as fast as Roman infantry ever ran to a fight—and yet they would be too late.

One glance at the heathen host had told the dictator that before the first legionary could reach the bridge, the Saxon vanguard would be pouring across it into the forum. Only cavalry could forestall them, and those who had come with Drusus had left their horses in Glevum!

Nine mounted messengers were all that were left to ride behind Drusus down the eastern slope of St. Mary's Mount. Their shortest road, the Via Vitellia, ran past the door of his own home, where Gwenlian was lodged, guarded by Meriaduc and Niall of the Sword with their fifty Ravens.

Hearing the bugles sounding from the Mount, the sentry posted at the garden gate beat sword on shield and shouted—

"To arms!"

Out poured the Irish, half-dressed but fully armed, as Drusus and his followers swept past.

"To the bridge!" he cried, and was gone.

It left Gwenlian unprotected, but those fifty swords might save the city, could they but reach the bridge in time.

Drusus reined in till the best mounted of the troopers drew abreast of him; then gave the man an order that sent him careering round the next corner into a side street leading to the waterfront. Another trooper Drusus despatched to the Hall of Justice, a third wheeled to the right as they crossed the forum and spurred down the road leading to Stannatio and Castellum Maris.

With the six men left him, Drusus galloped down the short Via Julia, leading straight from the forum to the Julian Bridge. This, the noblest structure of its kind in all Britain, crossed the estuary a short distance above where the broad harbor contracted into a riverlike channel scarce a hundred yards wide. Built of mighty blocks of white granite laid in Roman cement, it could not be broken down. Broad enough for twenty spearmen to walk abreast, how could it be defended by seven horsemen?

Judging by the short distance the enemy had to go and the rate at which they were marching, Drusus had fully expected to encounter their advance guard on the bridge itself. But he found there only the usual number of market gardners driving in their donkeys laden with vegetables, a policeman searching each pannier for smuggled wine, and two of the ponderous, ox-drawn wagons that brought in tin from the northern smelters. So peaceful was the scene that Drusus wondered for an instant whether he had really seen Saxons marching toward the bridge.

"Something wrong at that villa, sir!"

It was the policeman who spoke, pointing to a large white dwelling a quarter of a mile up the road and beyond the fork by whose other arm the donkey-drivers and wagoners had come. Even as he pointed, shrill screams and savage outcries were borne to their ears, and smoke began to rise above the red-tiled roof.

"The Saxon vanguard has scattered to plunder!" exclaimed Drusus. "They could not pass those villas without slaking their sea-thirst. We can not save those folk yonder, but by their death they have saved the city."

He turned to the wagoners.

"Unyoke those oxen! Run the wagon-tongue out through the balustrade! Now place the other wagon in like manner on the other side! Lash the rear axles together, pile the yokes beneath! Draw sabers and line the barricade!"

The two long wagons completely blocked the entrance to the bridge. Their bodies were of two inch planking, their wheels solid disks of wood, their loads great knucklebones of tin, ingots such as Pytheas the Massiliot had seen brought out to his stranded trireme, in just such wagons, nine hundred years before. The barrier was strong, but its garrison weak.

A war horn sounded up the road—Ceawlin was rallying his greedy churls. His long fair hair and beard streaming behind him, the Saxon King himself came charging down on the barricade with five thousand men, ax and spear, at his heels.

The roar from the heathen throats drowned out the drumming of hoof-beats coming across the bridge. Leaping from the bare-backed horses they had helped themselves to from the neighbor's stables, Niall, Meriaduc and ten Ravens scrambled into the wagons or took post behind them, in good time to meet the onset.

Savage blond faces rose up only to sink beneath the Christian sword-strokes, upthrust spears crossed with down-stabbing lances, the ponderous wagons creaked and slid sidewise on shrieking wheels at the impact of the living ram.

Stalwart thanes were crushed to death against the barrier by the pressure of those behind them, who straightway mounted to the assault on the still writhing bodies. Others stooped and crept under the wagon-bodies, to die beneath down-thrust lances or be sabered between the collar of the mail-shirt and the back of the helmet as they emerged.

Thrust through with long spears, struck down by throwing-axes, caught by the wrist and dragged to the ground before they could recover, the defenders were thinning fast. Those who were left fought with unspared strength, hoping only to live long enough for another blow—another stride nearer for the cohorts coming from the Mount!

Deep sank the dictator's sword into the rim of an up-flung shield and stuck there, tight-wedged in the tough linden wood. Roman wrist strained against Saxon forearm; between them the blade snapped three inches below the hilt. Hurling the hilt in his opponent's grinning face, Drusus stooped to the bottom of the wagon in which he stood, heaved high a fifty pound ingot and crushed the heathen lifeless beneath his shattered shield.

Another Saxon mounted by the wheel and sprang down beside Drusus, dagger in hand. The two grappled and wrestled, stumbling over the blocks of tin as they strove for possession of the knife and a chance to use it. Beneath their feet the wagon swayed, lurched, and suddenly toppled over, throwing them together on the granite pavement of the bridge, behind the barricade. Stunned by the fall, Drusus saw a dim vision of the Saxon's dagger hanging above him, and then saw and heard no more.

WHEN his senses began to clear—he was being held and lifted in mid-air. His out-stretched right leg touched something smooth and familiar—a saddle! They were lifting him on to his horse. Instinctively his knees gripped and his body straightened. The two who had helped him turned and sprang on their own mounts, as Drusus opened his eyes.

He looked to the left and saw that the wagon barrier had been burst apart and bent inward. Through the ever-widening gap poured the triumphant Saxons—and facing them, single-handed, stood the stripling Meriaduc! Niall of the Sword lay wounded unto death a few paces away. Meriaduc's shield was split, his crest shorn away, all his armor red with the blood that revolted him so. Yet he had held back an army long enough to save his friend, who in turn would save Wales—Britain.

Such was the thought in Meriaduc's heart as he stood there, fighting tensely, blindly, wildly—killing—hating it even in his frenzy, but doing it for Drusus and Britain. One instant Drusus saw him standing there, saw Niall struggle half to his feet and then sprawl, helpless, arms outstretched toward his prince, across a heap of dead and wounded Saxons. Then the barricade was swept utterly away by the onrushing heathen host, and the Captain of Ravens and Meriaduc of North Wales were no more. Drusus's heart heaved so that he could hardly breathe.

Back across the bridge fled the dictator and the two troopers, Ceawlin and all his host behind.

Loud and joyous rose the pirates' cheer. Directly before them, beyond the fountain playing in the forum, they could see the pillared porch of the great basilica, stored with unguarded gold.

Not quite unguarded, for now debouched from a side street into the Via Julia two hundred pikemen in light armor, led by a slender young man on horseback. He and Drusus met at the southern end of the bridge.

"I have no right to command—but they clamored for me to lead them—the prefect was not there," apologized Nicator as the police from the Hall of Justice formed up across the bridge-head, ten ranks deep, with their short riot-pikes at the charge.

"You are again their prefect!" answered Drusus.

Outnumbered twenty-five to one, the little phalanx of Bellerian police gripped tight their puny spears and prayed that they might not be swept off their feet by the weight and impetus of the charge now roaring down upon them. The legionaries from the Mount were still many streets away, and the heathen were very near.

Then a thunderbolt from Heaven seemed to strike and shatter the head and the long unshielded flank of the Saxon column. The solid front rank crumpled away into a heap of writhing, wounded, and mangled corpses. A few of those behind leapt over the fallen and threw themselves vainly on the serried Roman spears; but most of the Saxons stopped and looked to see whence came the sudden storm of missiles.

They saw that it came from the port battery of the *St. Michael*. Racing up the estuary from where she had been guarding the harbor mouth, the great dromon now lay within easy range of the Julian Bridge, raking its crowded length from end to end. Astern of her lay the *Scorpion*, a small cog that had been towed into position by the galley. From a bed of timbers in the open waist of this craft the beam of a mighty catapult rose and hurled through the Saxon ranks a volley of stones that broke red trails through the heart of the array.

"Remember Wulfgar!" wailed a survivor of yesterday's sea-fight. "Remember Cutha! Back, brothers, ere we are slain by those we can not reach!"

His cry found many echoes. Ceawlin saw that though he could cut his way out through the force in front, yet his long column could neither stand nor pass before the machines they feared so greatly. He called for Ventidius, but the traitor had disappeared. Looking first at the war ships anchored below the bridge and then turning his eyes upstream, the veteran warrior-king made a swift decision.

"Back!" he commanded.

"They flee! They draw off, crouching behind their shields!" rejoiced Nicator. "Here come the legionaires! We have won the day!"

"The day is scarce begun," answered Drusus. "Look! Ceawlin is marching his men upstream. The nearest ford is less than two miles away; they will cross there and attack the city from the east. We can not get ships above the bridge, and there are no carroballistae in Bellerium. We must meet him in the open, hand to hand!"

"THE Christians waver! Their God is one and weak—our gods are many and strong! On, warriors of Woden! In through the high gate and their city is ours!"

Long and bitter had been the battle for Bellerium. Many an hour had passed and many a man had died, since the repulse at the Julian Bridge and the crossing at the ford. There the centurion Agrestis and his farmer-reservists of the Tenth Cohort held the bank till the waters of the little river ran red with heathen blood. Forced back to the road, they had made another stand behind the line of tombs and monuments that fenced both sides of the highway.

Having won a foothold on the road, the Saxons drove doggedly down it toward the city. Before them the legionaries slowly retreated, hurling back volley on volley of pila, as their flexible open lines gave ground but never broke. Ceawlin's right rested on the river, but to keep his left from being outflanked, he had been forced to extend it through the further row of tombs and far up the slope beyond.

The ground was broken and steep, cut up into many little gardens and courtyards; high-walled enclosures, mysteriously opening into one another by alleys twisting among solidly built cottages and outhouses, rambling stables and noisome byres. There the shieldwall broke inevitably up into blundering detachments and individuals, unequally matched against the nimble Bellerians, with their knowledge of every byway, and their short Roman swords.

Yet somehow the Saxon left plunged deeper and deeper into the maze, till it had all but won through to the wider streets beyond. On the road Ceawlin and the main body had fought their way to within javelin cast of the great Arch of Victory. Standing at bay beneath it, Hastator's battered cohorts looked like the ghosts of the Lost Legion. They had thrown their last pilum, and their reddened sword arms hung wearily by their sides.

Forward surged the shieldwall; back reeled the ranks of Rome. To right and left they parted—and out through the gap rode Drusus and every cataphract of the Sixth Ala who could find a horse or wield a lance. Held in reserve till now, fresh men on unwearied horses, they swept through the Arch of Triumph and hit the Saxon shieldwall at the charge.

The locked shields flew asunder—down went thane and churl. Deeper and deeper into the writhing column thrust the riving wedge of mail-clad horsemen. With them rode the vengeful Ravens; behind and beside them charged the marines from the *St. Michael*, the seamen from the cogs—every man and boy in Bellerium who had strength to strike a blow for the women and little children who were watching from the housetops.

Terribly raged the close-locked fight. All knew that this was the final grapple, each felt himself the chosen champion of his race and faith. Well every warrior realized that death or slavery waited for the vanquished; and for the victors, the lordship not only of Legionis Asa but of all Briton. So hard they fought that no man saw that the sun was darkening in the heavens or felt that the earth was trembling beneath his feet.

The Saxon left, driven back through the hillside labyrinth by fresh foes, was the first to break and flee. Drusus, foremost among those pressing hard against Ceawlin's center, felt a great shudder run through those before him, an exultant surge of those behind, and knew that the fight was won. He turned in the saddle to cry his men on; but the shout that hung on his lips died unspoken at the sight that met his astounded eyes.

The great statue of Victory, standing with outstretched wreath in her chariot drawn by four brazen horses, was plunging down through the air from the top of the buckling, falling arch! The whole white city was heaving and crumbling like the crest of a breaking wave. And as the crashing roar of the downfall reached him, Drusus was himself hurled to the ground and lay there as if dead.

CHAPTER XXV

THE WRATH OF GOD

ORDERED to keep close by the king's side, Ventidius had perforce followed Ceawlin as far as the barricade on the bridge. Caught between the Saxons and the vengeful swords of Niall and Drusus, the crafty renegade had managed to creep unnoticed beneath one of the wagons. Observing the lashings that held the two wagons together, he had cut them, working slowly and cautiously lest he be seen and speared by one of the defenders, till the last rope parted and the barricade began to give way in the center.

One wagon was overturned; the other, folded back against the side of the bridge by the pressure of the Saxon throng, still afforded Ventidius a snug harbor. The rear wheels, thick disks of solid wood, shielded him on either hand; the massive axle and body made him a roof, between which and a heap of ingots and corpses he could look across the bridge toward the city.

When presently the warship's engines began to loose, neither shaft nor stone could touch him. Nor did the retreating Saxons spy him out, though the curses they called down upon his head were almost shouted in his ear.

"To thee, O Woden, I vow the smoking heart of Ventidius!" cried Ceawlin's voice, and an approving growl went up from those about the king.

The devoted victim felt a strong sense of injustice, after all he had done to introduce Woden worship into those parts. He lay as still as any corpse, until the *Scorpion* ceased loosing, after the Saxon rearguard had withdrawn out of range upstream.

Ventidius watched the Roman troops hastening to the opposite bank. The surprize attack on the city had failed; the battle would be long and doubtful now. Whichever side conquered would presently clear the bridge, find him and drag him forth to death. Yet he dared not stir from his hiding place, till the last fighting man had been landed from the Bellerian ships, lest he be spied by some watcher in the rigging.

Half an hour after the crews had left the two warships, Ventidius walked boldly across the Julian Bridge. He had exchanged clothes, armor and weapons with a dead cataphract who had fallen beside the wagon. A blood-stained sling supporting his bandaged forearm gave him leave to walk away from the fight now raging beyond the Arch of Victory. In the forum, a woman he had known well in the old days gave him a cup of wine, but failed to recognize in the tanned and bearded trooper the sleek politician of the year before.

Ventidius was elated. Now he would disappear into the secret places of the city, gather his old adherents, and prepare to plot against Drusus or Ceawlin, whichever should prevail. Then suddenly an audacious thought flashed through his brain.

Drusus had almost certainly brought Gwenlian back with him. She would be at his home with his aunt, and, since the last reserves were being thrown into the fight, the princess would be unguarded. He would go and see.

He was halfway up the Via Vitellia when the pavement began to rock beneath his feet.

NO longer an army but a throng of frightened fugitives, the Saxons raced back to the northern shore. Broken though they had been by the last Roman charge, they might yet have rallied under the gallant leadership of their king, but for a thing more terrible than death, harder to face than any mortal foe.

In the fury of the fight, they had not noticed the first quivering of the earthquake. Shock after shock stirred the ground under them, but still they battled on. Then, as the Saxon ranks gave way before the final onset, came a mighty shock that struck terror to the hearts of victors and vanquished alike. Wailing in fear, the heathen heard the louder shrieks of the terrified troop-horses. The battle ceased. Whole ranks, flung flat by the quake, clanged to earth.

The paved road and the ground beside it was split by wide crevasses that swallowed up both the living and the dead, then closed as suddenly as they had opened. The massive tombs that lined the roadside were thrown down and burst asunder, revealing the long-buried dead.

The hills nodded; the water of the river boiled angrily, turned yellow and disappeared in one soul-shaking moment. The sky became black, yet the frightful heat grew fiercer. A low prolonged moan rose from the tortured earth, like the groaning of an imprisoned giant.

With one accord the Saxons fled for the shore, to reach their ships and escape from this land of death and sorcery. To them, the heaving earth and the wild groaning of spirits beneath the ground were the work of the same power that had sent the hurtling missiles and charging lances to break their shieldwalls—it was the wrath of the Christian God.

Before that wrath they ran as if winged. They heeded not the laboring of their lungs, the sweat that poured from them in streams; the wounded recked not of their hurts. On and on they staggered, sobbing with exhaustion and terror.

They reached the hill once crowned by the villa of Ventidius. But now there was neither villa nor crest. House and site had melted away. At the end of the rise the ground sloped bare and empty to the beach.

One moment of silent wonder and the Saxons rushed down the new-made slope toward the sea. The earth they trod was fresh and soft, as if just turned up by a giant's spade. Villa and cliff had fallen in, filling the ancient mine and the sea cave beyond, obliterating the secret way by which the invaders had entered. And below, the sea itself had disappeared!

Beyond the beach, as far as a man could see, the bed of the ocean lay naked and empty. Reefs rose like hills above a glistening desert of sand and weed; a myriad of stranded fish flopped, dying, where once the heaving bosom of the ocean had lain deep and life-giving. Far out, sucked by the receding waters, the stranded Saxon ships lay heeled over on their sides. Their masts leaned drunkenly awry.

Mutely the Saxons stared at the awful miracle. Minute after minute they looked with eyes that rolled in fear. Then Ceawlin the King pointed far out over the bottom of the sea.

"Look!" he cried. "Behold! The wrath of Woden!"

A moving mountain, black beneath its snow-crest, the ocean was returning! Faster than arrow-flight, faster than the storm-wind, it rolled in resistless majesty toward the crumbling shore. With a roar that shook the earth, that fearsome wall of water swept in upon the stranded fleet, snatched up the ships like straws, and flung the long galleys to its foaming crest.

The heathen host stood as if paralyzed, helpless to move or cry out. Nor could they have escaped if they had run their fastest, so swift the earthquake wave rushed in upon them.

Though all earth and sea and Heaven itself seemed leagued against him, Ceawlin, facing his men, called in a voice that rang through the thunder of the waters:

"Shields up! Close ranks! Let us go to Woden like men!"

* * *

"IT IS hot," Gwenlian said wearily, brushing back a rebellious strand of hair. "How hard it must be for the men who fight beneath such a sun! And such fighting! Look, Tullia, how the dust rolls up above the houses!"

Tullia, her eyes deep-circled, gazed out of the open window, above the roofs of the city below.

"If we could only see!" she said impatiently. "Till the wind died, you could hear the clang of weapons and the shouting. God strengthen the arm of Drusus!"

"Amen! Hold this bandage for me, Tullia; I have dropped the linen."

"There will be need of many bandages," the Roman girl answered ominously. "The dead will be numbered in thousands. Holy Virgin! The house rocks!"

"It has shaken many times," Gwenlian answered, "but you did not notice. Look! The sky darkens—the city swims before my eyes! Tullia!"

The house seemed to leap into the air and shake itself to pieces. The shrieking crash of rending timbers silenced the cries of the women. Dust rose above the ruins. A prolonged cry of pain shrilled from the stables. Then all was silence.

Gwenlian awoke with a sense of strangling, to find herself in the dark. She was lying with aching shoulders on a mass of broken cement. Stretching out her hands, she felt about her and her heart sank. She was imprisoned, closed about with heaped-up timbers.

Then memory came back: The quiver of the shaken house, the last great shock, and the awful feeling of the solid concrete floor sinking beneath her feet. Her fingers groped about her prison. The house had fallen in upon her in such a way as to pen her in without crushing her. She was in a sort of tent of piled-up woodwork.

Tullia! Where were Tullia and Sophonisba? Had they too survived, or were they crushed under the ruins? She called again and again, but no answer came to her. Her fingers, fearfully exploring the peaks and hollows beneath her, touched something warm and wet. She screamed in horror.

A plank fell somewhere with a hollow crash, and a tiny ray of light struck across her eyes. Day! The sun again, within reach, beyond that wall of wood. She tore at the wedged mass that shut her in. Her hands were torn, but the planks would not stir. At last a beam loosened to her tugging; her narrow cell contracted with a dreadful settling sound, and she cowered in terror.

Smoke stung her nostrils, eddying through the gaps in the tangled mass of wood. A thin crackling sound began. More smoke poured in, and stung her eyes till the tears rose in them. Her breath came in gasps. The heat grew intolerable. The crackling swelled to the brisk snapping of burning wood.

Beating her fists against the walls of her prison, Gwenlian screamed, choked, and screamed again. Then, as she tried to compose herself for death, she heard an answering cry, and the chopping of steel through the débris. The planks between her and the day shook and split beneath repeated blows. The light rushed in and dazzled her. A hand clutched at her shoulder, fastened itself in the stout cloth of her dress, and drew her up. Strong arms were about her, lifting her free.

The unnatural darkness had cleared and the sun poured from the sky through a long strip of blue, with rolling oceans of black cloud on either side. Gwenlian was set on her feet beside the smoldering ruins of the house, where she stood, blinking in the sunlight. Her rescuer, a sturdy giant in the armor of a cataphract, flung off his helmet for a breath of air, then grabbed her and swung her to his shoulder. She screamed and struggled against him with all her strength.

She had seen his face. It was Ventidius, savage and triumphant!

* * *

DRUSUS groaned and opened his eyes. A shadow flitted before him, crouched and bent over him. A knife flashed from among rags. Rolling aside quickly, Drusus sprang to one knee, but his sword was beneath him. The shadow closed—a lean, wiry fellow with the face of a degenerate—and stabbed at his eyes.

Gathering himself on his haunches, Drusus rose with a bound, his knee striking the stabber in the chest, his hands clutching for a throat-hold. An instant's pressure, a sharp crack and the man dropped with a broken neck. Behind him lay a bag he had dropped, its open mouth spilling forth rings, coins, and jewels over the broken pavement.

Spurning the ghoul's carcass with his mailed foot, Drusus looked about him. Behind him the road was blocked by the wreckage of the fallen arch. Crushed beneath a massive coping-stone, the bodies of three soldiers lay in a pool of blood.

The whinny of a horse sounded in Drusus's ears. Nickering softly, the dictator's own charger came toward him, the reins hanging over its head. It had stood by him, during slaughter, earthquake, and ruin.

Drusus mounted and looked about him to see how went the fight. The view was empty of all but the ruins and the dead.

A slight, continuous tremor shook the ground. The air was tinged with the smell of smoke. Facing toward Bellerium, Drusus saw flames mounting, and heard the sound of distant singing. Leaping his horse over fallen blocks of stone, he rode into the city, his heart sick with the sight of the devastation on every side. The streets were almost choked with the débris of overthrown buildings.

Three sides of the forum lay in utter ruin. A lone pillar of the senate-house porch rose above the far-flung fragments of the fallen pediment. The baths were shattered, the noble basilica was a shapeless mass. But though all these massive structures had crumbled, the flimsy shops and booths on the eastern side of the square were almost uninjured.

Gathered about the broken fountain that still wildly spurted its waters in all directions, a huddled throng, half-crazed with grief and fear, sang with quavering voices hymns of prayer and penitence to the God who had loosed his anger on them. The heart of Drusus welled with sorrow for his stricken folk, but there was nothing he could do to ease their lot. Unless a shock greater than any before should come, they were as safe here as anywhere.

Crying out words of encouragement that none heeded, he rode westward up the hill. As far as the smoke allowed his eyes to range, there was nothing but fire and desolation.

Gwenlian! Tullia and his aunt! Even now they might be crushed beneath the ruins of the house that had been their home and his. He urged his charger forward.

"On! On!" he cried aloud.

By instinct, rather than by sight, he turned up the Via Vitellia. In through the half-fallen arch, over a sprawling corpse, he rode into his own garden. The house was a twisted mound of broken timber and masonry, flames writhing between the beams.

Crouched on the ground beside the ruins, with her back to him, the Welsh princess was watching the mortal struggle between two swordsmen. As Drusus sprang from his horse and ran toward her, she rose, without turning to look, and darted away. His voice, calling her name, brought her back. She came slowly toward him, looked up into his eyes with deep tragedy in her own.

In the torn and earthquake-rent garden two men were savagely fighting. One, in the scale-armor of a cataphract, was a burly brute, flailing about him with a heavy saber. The other, slender and young, with long disheveled hair that flowed over his light corselet, parried and thrust with a short, stabbing blade. Outweighed, out-reached, out-armored, but of finer technique, he held his own valiantly.

"Nicator!" Drusus muttered; but he did not call, lest Nicator hear and be distracted.

Then he saw the face of the young man's antagonist:

"Ventidius!"

His own sword leaped from its sheath. He motioned Gwenlian from his path and advanced in a long running stride over the trampled grass.

Wounded in the shoulder and bleeding from a fresh gash across the thigh, Nicator sprang in and out with supple grace, his two-edged blade darting at the traitor's throat, face and breast with lightning speed. Both men were near exhaustion, but Ventidius's weight told against him now, for his heart was pounding, and his arteries were hardened with foul living. The short sword had already drawn his blood, though slightly.

With one sweep of his arm, Drusus sent Nicator flying across the grass and himself confronted Ventidius. Snarling with rage at the sight of his arch-enemy, Ventidius flung himself forward with up-raised blade. Too enfuriated to parry, Drusus struck one mighty blow that swept aside his opponent's sword and split the traitor's skull.

Nicator was up again, his face pale and haggard.

"Welcome, and well done!" he cried.

"Now help me find Tullia! For ——'s sake——"

He snatched up an iron bar, which he had dropped on meeting Ventidius and the screaming Gwenlian, and attacked the ruins afresh. Heedless of smoke and flame, he pried at the burning planks. With a heavy heart, Drusus toiled beside him. They strained and tore at the wreckage, working like giants. The strength in Nicator's slight frame seemed stupendous.

"Ah! God!"

Stumbling back, Nicator threw one arm across his eyes. Then, stooping again, he tore away a long, heavy plank, and bent over the form of Tullia. Crushed terribly, the girl, mercifully, was quite dead.

The smoke rolled down upon them, edged with fire.

Nicator rose. His hand found that of Drusus and pressed it with an iron grip.

CHAPTER XXVI

MOTHER BRITAIN

DUMB with misery, Drusus gazed on the burning ruins that entombed his dead, Nicator and Gwenlian beside him.

Once more the earth shook, horribly, almost throwing them to the ground. Half the garden vanished, as a wide, bottomless cavern opened before their startled eyes. Again the clouds shut out the sun, and the sullen moan of the earth swelled and quivered.

Roused by the danger, Drusus mounted and lifted Gwenlian before him. From the horse's back he could see out over the garden and the hillside beyond, between the lashing trees. Where the sea had been, there rolled a vast expanse of sand and mud.

He rode out into the street, followed by Nicator, and looked down at the estuary. The harbor, too, was dry, and dotted with stranded ships. Below the bridge, the *St. Michael* was burning furiously.

A distant roar, like the far beat of a thousand muffled drums, rose from the south. Turning to look, Drusus saw, down by the horizon, but rolling swiftly nearer, a long, dark, white-topped line.

"The sea returns!" he said. "Find a horse, Nicator, and ride for your life up St. Mary's Mount!"

He urged his own horse at top speed up the Mount. Louder and louder grew the roar, mingled with the shriek of the wind that bore it. Drusus glanced over his shoulder and saw, by the lurid light of the burning city, a throng of frightened people pouring up the lower reaches of the slope, saw Nicator on a horse receiving several children from a woman.

There was not room for the children and their mother too to ride with Nicator. The woman ran after as fast as she could; but the horse soon left her far behind, the children crying for her. With yearning eyes and fear-winged feet the people sought the hills of God.

Through Drusus's brain ran an ironic shred of Scripture:

> "I will lift up mine eyes to the hills, whence cometh my help. My help cometh from God, the Maker of heaven and earth!"

Among the crowd plunged legionaries; here and there rode cataphract or Raven, helpless against a foe more merciless than the Saxon. Drusus rejoiced to see that scarce a trooper rode alone; nearly all had burdened their horses with women, with children or the old and infirm.

And though he could not see them, other throngs were fleeing to the scattered peaks along the northern shore. Legionis Asa, feeling itself sinking, raced like one man toward whatever high ground lay nearest.

The tumult of the waters drowned all voices. The earth rocked and pitched. In a darkness almost like that of night, the dictator's horse, mane and tail flying, galloped up the slope with screams and sobs of animal fear.

A shock mightier than any before shook the mountain to its foundations. It was not the shock of earthquake this time, but the impact of a tremendous blow. Spray dashed high above the shoulder where Drusus's horse had stood but a few moments before.

Flooding the empty harbor, tossing ships and wreckage like spindrift, the sea poured up over the lower town, submerging the houses and cutting off the upland with a deluge of brown water. Along the shore, the very cliffs crumbled and sank beneath that mounting fury. Northern and southern sea united, and together swallowed the land.

Behind the two on the great roan, a stream of fugitives swarmed up the breathless height. Long foaming tentacles of water snatched at the hindmost, dragging them down into the maw of the all-devouring sea.

Scrambling through underbrush, swerving around spurs of granite, the charger struggled on. With a final splendid effort, he topped the crest and stood out against the dark sky, a beacon for those below. The ghastly race between men and sea came to an end. St. Mary's Mount stood firm; the waters had reached their highest level.

Then, while Drusus and Gwenlian looked down at the raging ocean, while the stricken earth quivered in the last throes of the earthquake, the sky burst and poured out floods of rain. Wet and bedraggled, with torn garments and bleeding feet, the last survivors gained the summit. The rain swelled to incredible fury, beating the earth with a force that almost prostrated men and women, and shut out what little light had been left to that fearful day.

ALL that day and all the ensuing night the rain pelted down. But the next morning was bright, as if the universe had been washed clean. The heavens were a dazzling blue; the sun's rays warmed and comforted the survivors. But many who had escaped the tidal wave had died during that night of horror.

It was a woful band that stared down from the peak of St. Mary's on that which had been their home. Bellerium, the lovely city, had vanished beneath the waves. Nor was there any land, far as a man could see, save two-score scattered islets, the peaks of what had been the highest hills.

On the larger of these, to the north and the southwest, the handful of survivors—not two hundred in all—could just make out tiny patches of moving white, the fluttering garments of those who, like them, had escaped the flood.

But if they had lived through earthquake and storm, it seemed that they were spared merely to die of thirst. Horse flesh there was in plenty and driftwood for fires, but the rain water collected in hollows had to be doled out in pitiful rations.

For two more days, that seemed to drag eternally, they awaited such further vengeance as God might have in store for them.

It was Drusus who measured out the meager drops, seeing to it that the children and the women had the larger share. It was Gwenlian, faint and exhausted herself, who went among the women, heartening them as best she could, nursing the sick with tender care and loving words, having naught else to give them.

She would have mothered Nicator's children, whose own mother did not appear among the saved, but they would not leave Nicator for her. No one, not even she, could comfort and amuse them as he could.

Near noon of the third day, Drusus, scanning the sea for any sign of rescue, saw a fleck of white on the southern horizon. With a cry of joy, he heaped brushwood on the largest fire. On and on came that tiny fleck which bore their hope, till it grew into a sail.

"There, by God's grace, is our salvation!" the dictator said to them. "When I give the word, shout all, lest it pass us by."

And shout they did, their dry throats straining with the effort. An answering hail from the ship; it veered, and headed for the island that had been St. Mary's Mount.

A WOMAN screamed and rushed from the crowd, to faint in the arms of the wind-bitten seaman who was the first to step ashore.

"My wife! God be thanked! But what has happened? Where is the land?"

Briefly Drusus told him of the submergence of Legionis Asa beneath the sea. It was long before the sea captain could understand. His ship, a Bellerian merchantman, had discharged her cargo of tin at the Breton port of St. Paulus, put out in ballast, and weathered the storm. He had never known such winds and tides, and all the currents were changed past recognition. This last seemed to impress him most of all that had befallen.

With tears of joy in their eyes, the refugees descended to the natural harbor—between two shoulders above the drowned city—and embarked, crowding the roomy roundship. Over-passengered as she was, the craft touched at the other islands left by the waves, and took on over a hundred more.

The captain addressed himself to Drusus, still dictator, as long as a Bellerian lived.

"Where to, Lord Drusus?"

Carbo, one of the two senators left alive, shouldered forward.

"To Brittany—where else?" he proclaimed.

But Drusus bent to Gwenlian and asked a question, and then answered the captain himself:

"The Prince of Powys awaits me in Wessex," he said, "where I swore to join him. North Wales, the land of Owain, will yet spring to arms for Owain's daughter. To Glevum, Captain! I count eight and thirty of my horsemen here, spared by the sea."

His manner softened. In gentler tones he resumed:

"In our pride we have called ourselves Romans, and despised the land that gave us birth. For that God has punished us. No Romans are we, but Britons!"

Gwenlian's eyes were stars as she looked at him, but no one looked at her. All eyes, like hers, were on Drusus's glowing face.

"We are Britons," he repeated, "and while a single Saxon lives on British soil, we will not abandon our Mother!"

A shout went up from end to end of the round ship:

"Hail Drusus! To Glevum! To Glevum! Hail, Drusus! Hail! Hail! Hail!"

THE END

SONGS

by Berton Braley

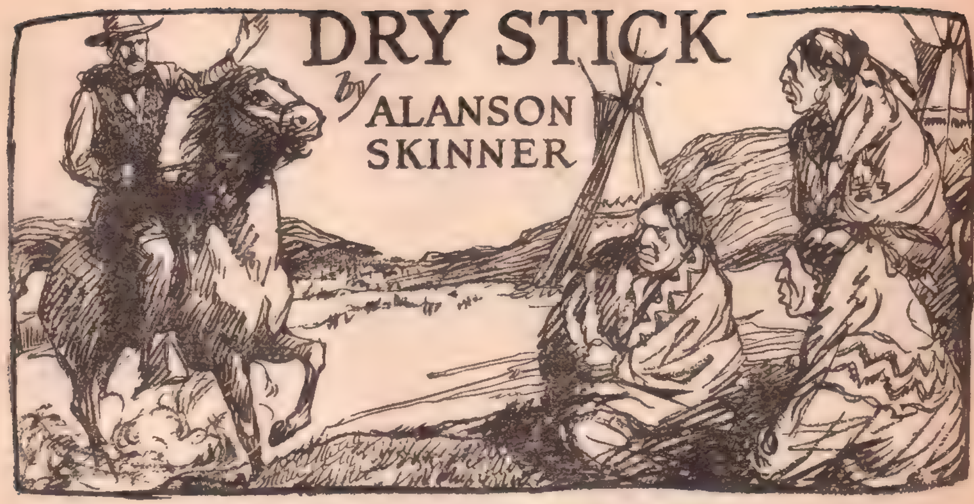
With Apologies to G. K. Chesterton

I AM sick of little songs,
The fragile and the brittle songs
That can not stand the tempest and that wilt beneath the sun.
I want to hear the wonder songs,
The lightning and the thunder songs,
The songs that rise where battles roar and wars are lost and won.

The old, bold, loud songs,
The true-blue proud songs,
Such as the vikings chanted or the knights of Arthur sang;
The songs the valiant shouted
In the face of death they flouted;
The songs that ring with courage and that have a robust tang.

I am sick of tiny songs,
The whimpering and whiny songs
That little souls and timid hearts have woven of despair.
I want to hear defiant songs,
The fearless self-reliant songs
Of men who meet the eyes of fate and give her stare for stare!

The keen, clean, clear songs,
The show-no-fear songs
Of men who shirk no duty and who stoutly play the game;
The songs that thrill within you
Each nerve and bone and sinew,
And set your pulses coursing with an ichor made of flame!



DRY STICK

by ALANSON SKINNER

Author of "Wolf Medicine," "A Well in the Desert," etc.

MAHTO-ITE-WAKAN, the Holy-Faced Bear, had honored me as one Sioux does another. On my feet were gorgeous new moccasins, his gift. About me was wrapped a splendid buffalo robe, his present. Upon my head was a magnificent eagle feather war bonnet, largess from my host, and Beautiful-Day Woman, his wife, was at that very instant setting before me an immense wooden bowl, carved by infinite labor, with burning and scraping, from the burl of a tree. In that bowl was a gracefully shaped spoon of jetty buffalo horn, and a steaming portion of stewed dog!

A man eats what is set before him; that is an old Indian maxim. These people were my hosts. Therefore I ate, and Holy-Faced Bear beamed his satisfaction, until his hard old face was illumined. When the buffalo horn spoon scraped the bottom of the bowl he filled his redstone pipe, dropped a living coal on the tobacco in the bowl, puffed to the four directions, and handed it to me. Another gift for, though poor to the point of penury, Holy-Faced Bear was a Sioux, and the Sioux are proud.

Therefore, again I accepted his bounty without murmur, and thought in my heart of how I would repay him. There was his toddling grandson, now, Yellow Whirlwind; it would take time to have that cunning baby crib sent from Sears and Roebuck, but that was the answer.

A direct gift would be an insult, but this I knew, Holy-Faced Bear, the battle-scarred warrior, whose coups were almost countless, was an Indian, and there lives no Indian, no matter how terrible on the warpath, how unrelenting toward his foemen, who does not love a little child, especially his own blood and bone. Therefore I was content to receive the gifts, for my time was coming.

"Ah, my friend," exclaimed Holy-Faced Bear, breaking the silence, "what a pity you were born a generation too late! You should have seen the Sioux when they were rich, happy, and powerful. When our teepees whitened the prairie. When we were not confined on reservations. Then, indeed, we were men.

"In my early boyhood we did not see many Long Knives, Americans, and such as came to us were chiefs, who wore long hair, and married among us and lived like Indians. A very few there were then. Later on they swarmed like grasshoppers. We saw the buffalo vanishing and our hunting grounds destroyed. Then we thought to kill them all and save our country. But it was no use.

"We slew and slew and slew, and still they came on. Now we are reduced to nothing. We are poor. I, even I, Holy-Faced Bear, who once owned a thousand horses, have scarcely wherewithal to make my friend a present when he comes to see me.

"I remember well the first white man who came to our village on the Rosebud. Who he was, no one knew. Where he came from, that was a mystery. But he was in our camp, on foot, at night, and sorely wounded, passing by our scouts no one knew how, so what else was there to do but to take him in? He was a very sick man at first, but we fed him broth and a little pounded dry meat, and finally he began to regain his strength. Old Standing Buffalo, our chief, in whose teepee he had been carried, could talk just enough English to understand part of what he said in his sickness, when he was out of his head.

"There was a woman in it, for he heard her name, though he could not repeat it, and then it seems that there was shooting over her. Anyway, some other Long Knife had done this man a great wrong, and he had killed him, which was right. But the Long Knives have their customs as we have ours, therefore this man who came to us had forfeited his freedom, and maybe his own life because he had had justice.

" 'It is in my heart that we forget this matter,' said Standing Buffalo to his councillors. 'It is not wrong to kill a man in defense of one's own among us. If he wishes to sit down here on the Rosebud when he is well, I shall not prevent it. These Long Knives know many things that are useful to the poor Indian.'

"And so it came about. The Long Knife did not wish to leave the teepee of Standing Buffalo. There was, perhaps, no place else where he was safe. Maybe it was only because he liked the Indians. He was no common white man. He spoke in a quiet, pleasant voice, like a Sioux, and not in loud noisy tones. He did not swear. He was generous with what he had. He was kind to children. So, first, we became used to him. Then we began to feel friendly to him and finally we loved him.

"HE WAS a man who would do anything for a friend. His horses—for he had money, and sent our young men out to purchase for him—were at the disposal of those who needed them. His teepee was the teepee of him who had no shelter. He was grateful to us Sioux because we had saved him, and he repaid us over and over. And, best of all, he was a man, and was not afraid of anything.

"Two winters passed, and he was still with us. Then came the second white man to our village. He came in peace, and we permitted him to enter. A tall, lean, sour-faced man, whom the young men promptly named 'Dry Stick.' He dressed in black, and spoke to us constantly about things which we did not understand. Wherever he went he had a little book in his hand that he told us—for he could talk some bad Santee Sioux—was God's word.

"He said he had come to save us from hell—he had to explain what that meant, my friend—and that we must stop our dances at once, because they belonged to the devil. Everything that we did, it seems, was devil's work. He interfered with everything he saw or heard of. He was a pest and, but for Standing Buffalo, his head would have been split with an ax before the first moon had passed.

" 'There is no honor in slaying Dry Stick,' said Standing Buffalo to the young men through his heralds. 'The Great Spirit, Wakan Tanka, has made everything for some purpose, even the snakes. No doubt He has a reason for Dry Stick, which He will reveal to us. If you desire to shed blood, the Crows and the Blackfeet are to the north of us, and they be men. In the path to the north lies honor!'

"And then came the spotted sickness, the small-pox, the Long Knives call it. O, my friend, we were encompassed by death. There was despair and mourning in every lodge. Women wailed from morning till evening, gashing their flesh and hacking off their hair in despair. It seemed as if all of us would be finished.

"One afternoon, when it was seen that the medicine men were of no avail, Standing Buffalo called a general council. Our white man had been missing—they said that he had run away from the sickness—but Dry Stick was there. Standing Buffalo had desired to turn to the two Long Knives for advice, but the flight of our white man left him disappointed.

"It was not like our white man to flee from danger, he had never done so before, but so it seemed. But Dry Stick had plenty of advice to give us. We were wicked heathen, and we were all on the road to hell. The God of the white people had sent this sickness to destroy us, because we danced, and worshiped the Great Spirit, and were happy. We would all die if we did not obey Dry Stick and his gloomy God.

"'What is in your hearts, my people?' asked Standing Buffalo, and a silence fell over the multitude, and no one raised his head. Suddenly there came a clattering of hoofs, and confusion at the edge of the crowd bearing inward to the center.

"'It is Our White Man returning!' shouted the people, and they fell back to let him enter, all sweaty and dusty and exhausted.

"'O Standing Buffalo, and people of the Dakota nation!' he shouted, 'I have not abandoned you! I have brought you a great medicine from the Long Knives! Behold, I call upon you to come forward, chiefs and warriors, men and women, boy-children and girl-children! I shall say a few words of magic and scratch you, and those whom I shall scratch shall be protected from the spotted sickness.'

"He seized old Standing Buffalo and dragged him to his feet before them:

"'Thus is it done—so, and so, and so—as quickly as this. And it hurts less than the slightest cutting at the Sun Dance. Here woman, give me your girl-child. There, listen, these be magic words, now say them after me, and it will not hurt when I scratch you, thus—*Peterpiperpickedapeckofpickeledpeppers*.' (You see, I remember that small-pox charm), 'and there you are, that didn't hurt, did it?'

"And the little one laughed and hung her head.

"All that day and all the next night Our White Man, for this name seemed to have grown onto him, worked over the people of the Sioux nation. And it was a very great medicine that he had, for he saved us. It was as he had said, that those whom he scratched and muttered magic over, did not sicken and die. And when the last one was treated, he fell down and slept on the prairie, and the Quill Working Women's Society set up a new and beautiful teepee over him where he lay, and the Kit Fox Society of the warriors set up a guard over it.

"IT WAS about noon after that, that Standing Buffalo again called a council of his chiefs and warriors:

"'My brothers,' said the old chief, 'I have something to tell you. There is a body of white men, all armed, waiting over by the Dead Horse Coulée. When Our White Man went to the city of the Long Knives to procure the medicine for the spotted sickness, some one there recognized him, and this is a white chief, they call him Sheriff, with his followers. They demand Our White Man, because, according to their custom they desire to take him back and tie a rope around his neck, and choke him to death. What is in your hearts?'

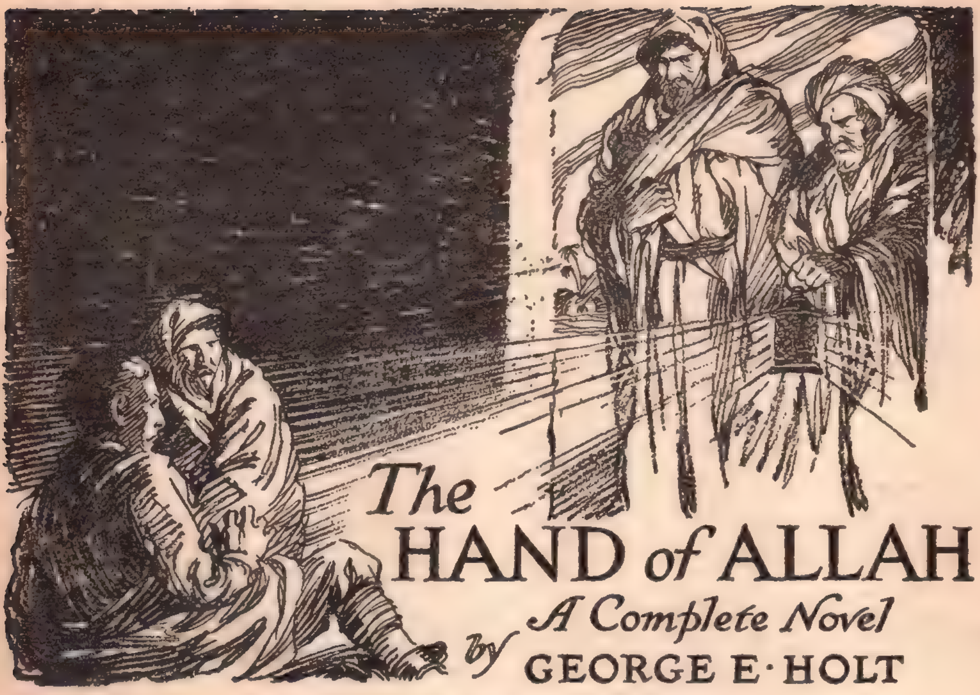
"'Let us fight!' cried the young men in chorus, and there was a stirring among the elders also.

"'Not so, my children,' cried Standing Buffalo in answer. 'I have been out to the Dead Horse Coulée and I have seen these Long Knives and talked to them. I have learned from them that there was not one of them who had ever seen Our White Man. I have sent them food, and only a little while since the Kit Fox Warrior Society took them their prisoner, bound and helpless, and already they are on their way home, rejoicing.'

"A thousand braves and warriors were on their feet shouting and threatening, brandishing their weapons, but Standing Buffalo gazed calmly at them:

"'Lower your weapons, O people of the Sioux nation,' he called above the uproar. 'Do you think that I am a dog to turn and bite our benefactor? Have I not told you that they had never gazed upon the face of the man for whom they were searching? Dry Stick is the name of the prisoner that the Kit Foxes delivered to them. Our White Man, guided by his wife, my daughter, is already half way to the line that marks off Canada!'

"Yes, Standing Buffalo was very old and wise, and when he said that the Great Spirit had created nothing which was useless, even a snake, he spoke the truth."



The HAND of ALLAH

A Complete Novel

by GEORGE E. HOLT

Author of "The Kaid of El-Sibba," "Chuckling Gold," etc.

HADJ HAMED, of Tangier, was writing a letter.

Outside his little cubby-hole of a shop on the Siageen, or main street, of Tangier, was all the noise and rush of Thursday market-day-laden mules and donkeys urged on by the shrill voices of their drivers, the clatter of shod and unshod hoofs upon the ancient cobblestones; the cries of sweet-sellers and auctioneers, the tinkle of the bell of the water carriers, the hum of pedestrian voices. The little shop of Hadj Hamed was like a tranquil cove beside a rushing river, and in it Hadj Hamed, wrapped in a thin white *sulham*, sat crosslegged in tranquillity before a small, gaudily painted tabouret, and made queer Arabic words upon a big sheet of paper with a pen made of a sliver of bamboo.

Either Hadj Hamed was a slow writer or a slow thinker; or the contents of his letter required much consideration; for although he had been at work upon the epistle for an hour, the page was not yet filled, and after every line or two of writing he remained lost in thought, staring through the frame of the doorway at the constantly changing picture which passed outside. Perhaps he was not accustomed to letter writing; most Moroccan merchants are not, and that Hadj Hamed was a merchant was indicated not only by his possession of the little shop upon the Tangier main street, but also by the shelves which surrounded him, holding their burdens of slippers, *djellabas* and *sulhams*.

There were neatly folded garments of every color from white to black, and slippers of every sort—the yellow *bilghai* for men, the red ones, with heavy soles, for women's street wear, and velvet ones, embroidered with gold and silver designs, for house use; tiny imitations of the latter for the girls; and even several pairs of the wooden-soled sandals for children, called *kabakib*, because that is the word they utter as they pass along on the hurrying childish feet. Yes, here was the customary setting for a Moroccan merchant, and Hadj Hamed himself, young of face despite the small brown beard and mustache, and pensive of dark eye, appeared to be a typical tradesman, content with the lazy life of a merchant and its small but sufficient rewards.

The letter on which Hadj Hamed was making steady, however slow, progress, might have suggested, had it been seen, that for a peaceful merchant Hadj Hamed had a strange interest in matters little concerned

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"The Hand of Allah," copyright, 1924, by George E. Holt.

with the sale of *djellabas* and slippers. Thus had he written:

> You will be interested to know that no little excitement has been caused by the proclamation of his Majesty concerning the offer of the mining concession in Zemmur Province, news of which I sent you in my last communication. The situation is, I think, highly dangerous to the country, and there is common talk that he has been either coerced or tricked into it by those infidel dogs that infest his court. What has caused him to take this step can make little difference in the results.
>
> There is little question that either French or German nationals will secure the concession, and one will be as bad for Morocco as the other. England may make a bid, but only for appearances, and although the entries close a week hence, the French and German firms are the only other entrants. The English firm is represented by Mr. Jamieson, formerly the British Vice Consul at Mogador, whom you will no doubt remember. He is friendly toward us. The great German firm of Mannheim Brothers has sent Herr Feldmann, who, I am sure, was here in the train of the Emperor in 1905. France has endorsed the firm of Nugent Frères, whose representative is Maurice de Beaumont, who is too well known to you to need further comment from me.
>
> No man can tell what will come of this, but when our enemies fight each other there is something to be gained, as well as something to be lost. Perhaps our opportunity will come through this, our opportunity to regain that position and power which we have lost. Such is my great hope, and I shall watch events most carefully.

Hadj Hamed reread the written words slowly and thoughtfully, now nodding his head as if in affirmative emphasis of the words he had written, now wrinkling his forehead in a frown as if questioning their truthfulness or completeness, and again staring with unseeing eyes at the busy street outside as if his pen had conjured up strange visions. As indeed they had. No one perhaps could imagine a more truthful picture of the possible and probable results to his own country of this mad submission of the youthful Sultan to those infidel plotters whose purpose was to bring Morocco under the yoke of a European power.

No one knew better than Hadj Hamed that the fight for power in Morocco now involved but the two powerful contestants, France and Germany, and no one could imagine better than he the length to which both would go to obtain this desirable province, a province as big as France itself, and of vast potential wealth. He knew, as many did not know, that England, the ancient friend of Morocco, in exchange for a free hand in Egypt had given France an even freer hand in Morocco, and that with this act had allied herself with the French against Germany for Moroccan control, although her alliance consisted of complete passivity in Moorish affairs.

Spain counted for little. Of the Franco-Spanish agreement Hadj Hamed also knew—that agreement whereby France had deceived his Most Catholic Majesty, Alfonso XIII, into believing that when the French secured control of Al Moghreb, Spain would share equally. Thinking of this, Hadj Hamed smiled grimly.

"France," he said to himself, "will make a cat's-paw of Alfonso. The conquest of northern Morocco will fall to Spain. But Spain will find that France will finance and encourage our people in the struggle against her ally, with the inevitable result that the time will come when Spain will have to admit that she can not conquer. Then will France take over the work and control Morocco alone."

Gifted with prophetic vision was Hadj Hamed, as the years have shown. But greater danger still he perceived, and visioned dimly a great catastrophe to come to the world through the clashing desires for this Moorish province. That France would ever give up the dream of her North African Empire, to stretch unbroken from Tunis to the Atlantic, was inconceivable; but over it stood the menace of the war-lord of Germany with drawn sword and mailed fist, demanding room for the expansion of his people. Morocco was between the millstones.

And while these greater forces operated massively, the little forces of destruction worked from within, surrounded and betrayed him of whom it was written in the Book of Fate that he was to be the last independent Sultan of the Shareefian Empire—a youthful lord of a dying feudal race, persisting into a historical epoch beyond its allotted time.

THE reflections of Hadj Hamed were interrupted. A shadow fell upon the floor of his shop and a figure stepped across the sill, a brown native boy dressed in the common brown *djellaba*, yellow slippers and red cap of the native youth, who greeted the older man respectfully.

"*Gliss*," said Hadj Hamed. "Sit, Mustapha."

Removing his slippers, the boy sank cross-legged upon the floor beside Hadj Hamed.

"There is something new," he said.

"There is always something new," replied Hadj Hamed, smiling faintly; "but sometimes it is not true, and sometimes it is not important."

"Nevertheless, this, I believe, is both true and important."

"Speak then," commanded Hadj Hamed.

"It is this." Mustapha lowered his voice cautiously. "Do you remember a certain American who lived here some years ago in the white house of the former British Consul, on the Marshan? He who traveled much about the country and who became a chief in Anghera Province?"

"I remember such a man," answered Hadj Hamed, nodding and rubbing his nose. "Yes, I remember him, but not his name. He was called in our language Sidi Abdelmalek 'Mercani. A lean, straight man with gray eyes that saw far."

"That is the man," said Mustapha. "His American name is Travers, I think; at least that is the way it sounds."

Hadj Hamed nodded swiftly.

"*Aiwa.* I remember now. Sidi Travers, called Sidi Abdelmalek. And what of him?"

"Of him it is said in the German Legation, where my cousin is groom to the *bashador*, that he arrives today on the *Dersa* from Gilbraltar and that he comes to attempt to secure the mining concession for his own country."

"Hmph!" grunted Hadj Hamed, turning absent-minded eyes upon Mustapha's face. "So. It is *said* that he comes for that purpose. Who has said so? Whence comes your information?"

"As I have said, Sidi Hamed, my cousin Hamido is employed by the German doctor. And he is smaller than I."

Hadj Hamed chuckled softly. The youth, Mustapha, had a trick of humor. And a very wise head sat upon his young shoulders. He was a lad of about sixteen, with a character intended by nature for the penetration of the secrets of others.

"While he was holding the horses for the *bashador* and his secretary this morning he overheard the *bashador* telling his scribe this thing. There had been a telegram to the *bashador* from Gibraltar. My cousin paid little attention to the matter, and mentioned it to me only because he himself remembered the American and worked for him when he traveled in Anghera."

"The news is good, Mustapha," said Hadj Hamed, and the boy's face showed youthful pleasure at the praise. "Yes, it is good. Probably it is true. That we will know ere long, when the *Dersa* comes. Go thou to the landing stage this afternoon and watch. If the American arrives, come to me. In the mean time go to Ibn Omar and tell him to prepare to leave at sunset with a letter from me to the one of whom you know."

The boy rose and stuck brown feet into his slippers. Hadj Hamed raised a hand, detaining him.

"One other thing, Mustapha. If the American comes, I desire to—hm—to know what he does."

The boy returned his elder's keen look, nodded and smiled understanding.

"I shall be as his shadow," he said.

When Mustapha had gone Hadj Hamed looked at his letter and fell into a reverie. Then he folded the paper and placed it in his *shakarah.*

"There will be more to write," he observed, "after I am sure concerning this American. Hmph! There are opportunities here, I think. Opportunities, *inshallah* —if God wills."

II

TRAVERS set foot upon the rickety wooden landing stage at Tangier with a strong feeling that he had come home. This sense of intimacy with his surroundings had been growing swiftly, so little alteration had taken place in the years since he had been here before. In Gibraltar he had walked up Waterport Street to the Alameda Gardens, noting as he progressed that there were almost no changes among the shops which lined the street; they seemed to have taken on something of the rugged unchangeability of the Rock itself. He looked up the steep slopes toward the summit, past the Moorish castle, past the area of green which marked the shrubbery zone, and to the great bare granite peak.

As he gazed, one of the yellow carriages which serve the people of Gibraltar as cabs drove by. His eyes met those of the occupant, who, after a moment of puzzlement, smiled and waved. The man in the carriage was a dark, smooth-shaven individual, except for black mustache, with more than a trace of the Latin in his appearance.

Travers recognized him as the American Consul.

"Unchangeable again," he commented to himself. "Dick succeeded his father, and his father succeeded the grandfather; for a hundred years the three generations have represented us here. A fine record! And a fine man!"

On his way back to the pier, where he was to take boat for Tangier, he was accosted by an ancient, white-robed Moor standing in front of a little curiosity shop. The Moor's memory was good, but no better than Travers'. He greeted the Moor with a handclasp and a smile, which were cordially returned.

"You are still here, too, Sid Achmed?" said Travers. "Still selling curios to the traveling public?"

"Assuredly, *sidi*," answered the Moor. "It is a good place. I am content," and then changed his tongue from English to Arabic.

Travers was surprized to find that his own knowledge of the language had suffered little by his years of absence; was surprized also to feel that the rolling Arabic in his ears and on his tongue had swiftly wiped out the years in which he had neither heard it nor spoken it, years which had taken him "round the world and back again." Somehow it gave him confidence; confidence in himself and in his ability to do the job that had fallen to his hands.

He pondered this sensation during the rest of his walk to the boat; was at first puzzled by it; at last realized, with a swift flash of revealment, that it was due to his subconscious memory of those days when he had first set foot in ancient Tangier, had been surrounded by strange and unknowable figures in astonishing draperies and cowled heads and by a pandemonium of a language in keeping with the queer menacing city and its people.

This memory unlocked the door to a flood of emotions which came tumbling out one over the other. It had been weeks before he had been able to feel that he was not the single representative of an alien modern race in an ancient civilization, weeks before he had been able to look into the eyes of a Moor with the realization that a flowing *sulham* covered a body which functioned like his own, that the Arabic tongue voiced thoughts which were fundamentally as his own thoughts, that the heart within was lightened or burdened by the same happiness or sorrow which ran its design through the carpet of his own life.

And it had been months before he had been able to overcome the feeling of strangeness, of being an alien, unacceptable to an ancient people; only through his learning of the Arabic tongue had he been able to enter into their lives deeply enough to feel natural among them. But through that he came to the knowledge that men of whatever color and whatever race and whatever creed are—except for that infinitesimal portion which is no greater in the differentiation of races than of individuals—the same. One man is like another; he must eat and drink and sleep and love and labor and struggle and succeed or fail; he is subject to the sun and the wind and the rain, to high hopes and black hopelessness, to illness of body or of mind—a brother in the universal lodge of life.

AND so the years were swiftly wiped out for Travers. He had gone up Waterport Street an American with a picture of Moroccan life in the background of his memory; he went down Waterport Street thinking in Arabic, living in Morocco, with a picture of American life small upon the screen of his memory.

Tangier City, shining opalescent upon the hills, seemed to reach out across the blue Straits to welcome him. The little rickety steamer, the *Dersa*, seemed to gain speed, to thrust the indigo water more swiftly aside. Travers, standing in the bow of the boat, leaning upon the rail, gazed at the thousand-colored city and surrendered himself completely to that hypnotic charm which can no more be described or analyzed than can the charm of love between man and woman.

A dozen miles away, as yet, the queer odors of street and market place came to Travers' nostrils; in his ears was the tinkle of water carriers' bells, the patter of donkeys' feet upon the cobblestones or the harsher clatter of shod hoofs; the shrill cries of itinerant candy venders, "*Ah Mulai Idress!*" Hoarse voices urging beasts of burden to greater effort, the blubber of camels lying in the *sôk*, the shrill fifes and rumbling drums of religious beggers soliciting alms, the lonely cries of blind beggars at the gates: "*All'arbi! All'arbi!*—Alms in the name of Allah the Compassionate."

He saw the walls of the narrow main

street, each plaster building a different color from its neighbor, but all connected, like a wasp's nest; he saw the play of the sunlight upon the *sulhams* and *djellabas* of many colors, upon red fezes and white turbans and yellow slippers, upon fancy-colored leather *shakarahs*, embroidered startingly with silk, upon brass or silver *kumiahs*, long curved knives hanging from ropes of gorgeously colored silk; he looked into the faces of brown Berber and black Sudanese and sallow Jew, of white city Moor and tanned countryman. And it was not strange.

The strange thing was that behind him a tourist was speaking in the strange English tongue about railroad trains. So deeply had Travers sunk into the past that he found himself making an effort to follow the English words.

Tangier seized him to her breast, embraced him with passionate arms, hurried him from the shouting landing stage through the littered customs house and into the swirl of the main street; seemed actually as a benevolent though invisible figure beside him leading him, but too slowly for his own desire, into that myriad-voiced, multicolored rush of native life, which met him with a whirlpool in the *Soco-Chico*, or Little Market.

Suddenly he was shaken as one is shaken by the meeting of a loved friend at the end of a long journey. His heart hurt him with a physical pain; the scene blurred mistily; by some peculiar trick of suggestion he thought of Lazarus coming back from the dead; and as swiftly as this emotion had seized and shaken him it was followed by another, by a feeling of that infinite peace which comes from an infinite understanding.

He crossed the market place laughing, dodging a laden donkey and throwing an Arabic phrase at the boy who drove it. At one of a number of little white tables standing in front of the Café Aleman he seated himself, ordered a whisky and soda from the white-aproned German waiter and surrendered himself to that blessed thrill of which adventurers the world over often dream. He was home again.

He was watching with amusement the efforts of a brown Moorish boy to balance upon the back of a spindling donkey a packing case almost as big as the donkey itself, when he became aware that a brown *djellaba*-ed figure stood beside him and had spoken to him. He looked into the brown smiling face, pock-marked and sooty with an embryonic beard and mustache, a broad expanse of yellow teeth, a shaven head encircled by a rope of braided camel's hair. Travers gave back grin for grin.

"Hello, Bigote," he greeted.

"*Salamalukum, sidi,*" replied Bigote, ducking his head. "You come back to Tangier. Been gone long time."

Travers nodded.

"Just the same Bigote," he reflected.

The "boy" was near thirty; but his development, both physical and mental, had stopped a dozen years before: perhaps a matter of five hundred lashes at the whipping-post had had something to do with it. In the old days he had served as groom to Travers, and also as protector of Travers' goods against theft.

True, he himself, whenever in need of funds, would possess himself of some article which belonged to his master—usually a silver knife, which came to be reserved for this purpose—and would pawn it with some Jew. Travers, finding the *kumiah* missing, would thereupon give Bigote an advance on wages which would enable him to regain it. But no others might share in this use of his master's possessions. Bigote was honest, and he took pride in the fact.

"You go stay long?" asked Bigote; he had a smattering of a dozen languages.

"Don't know," answered Travers. "*Quien sabe?*"

"Then you want horse," suggested Bigote. "Me no work nobody now. Me work for you. Me need money."

"All right," said Travers, laughing and sliding a dollar across the table to the boy. "You find me a good horse and bring it to the Hotel Cavilla tomorrow morning. Don't want it today. Good horse, remember."

"Sure. Good horse," echoed Bigote, picking up the dollar. "Thanks."

He made a little gesture of salute and shuffled away up the street.

Travers finished his drink and proceeded up the main street, noting, remembering, the little cubby-hole shops which lined it—shops wherein native merchants squatted upon the floor, their goods within easy reach upon shelves; where customers stood haggling at the door, or friends and acquaintances sat at ease upon the doorsill discussing with the proprietors. Here and there an ugly "European" building rose above the native shops, giving the impression of a bully who has shouldered his way rudely into a peaceful group and stands a defiant alien among them.

A crush of traffic brought him to a standstill before one of the little shops wherein a placid-faced Moor sat surrounded by multicolored *sulhams*, *djellabas* and slippers. Thrust into the doorway by a charging laden donkey, Travers met the smiling eyes of the shopkeeper and smiled reply.

"It is a busy street," said Travers in Arabic.

The Moor's calm face flickered at sound of his native tongue on the lips of the *Nasrini*, but he replied politely in like language. And as Travers proceeded on his way, Hadj Hamed suddenly solved a problem which had come to him with the Arabic greeting from the foreigner.

"I remember now," thought Hadj Hamed. "He is the American whom the natives of Anghera call Sidi Abdelmalek 'Mercani."

But in the mind of Travers was no recognition of the shopkeeper, nor any premonition that the quiet figure in the little shop was destined to play a part in his affairs.

Shortly he came to the Place of the Three Gates, which terminates the main thoroughfare on the west. Here three arches form a triangle, one opening into the main street, one upon the roads which lead to the heights of Tangier, called the Marshan, and the third opening into the *Sôk-el-Kebir*, or Great Market Place. Here the crowds are thickest as traffic from three directions crash.

To preserve order, city guards are stationed, brown fellows in scarlet coats with brass buttons, baggy yellow pantaloons and red fezes, armed with ancient rifles which serve as clubs to settle arguments and to untangle knotted traffic. Upon the walls of the arches notices of every sort are posted —notices in half a dozen languages, announcing anything from a new regulation of the Commission of Hygiene to the proclamation of a new Sultan. And between the arches sit beggars wrapped in their filthy cloaks, beggars with one eye or none at all, the lame and the halt and the blind and the maimed, holding black, greasy begging bowls in horny hands and voicing their monotonous cry of "*All'arbi! All'arbi!*— Alms in the name of Allah the Compassionate."

Travers made his way slowly and warily through the crush of men and animals to the gate which opens into the great market place. The *sôk* stretched out before him rises toward the south, past the little squat blue shrine of Sidi Mekfi, the rain saint, up to the big black bulk of the Hotel Cavilla, the El Mochingo coffee house and the adjoining soldiers' barracks, over which peeked from the distance the tree-shaded terraces of the Ville de France, and on the west to the white-dotted rise which is the native cemetery.

He paused for a moment in the protection of the hills and watched the scene—a familiar one, one that he had watched daily for three years from the balconies and tiled terraces of the Hotel Cavilla. The "Heart of Tangier" he had called the Great Market Place, and the heart of Tangier it was, where native life beat resistlessly, sending its blood out through the arterial highways which ran from it.

He was about to pass on, now anxious quickly to reach the hotel, to gain the upper balcony, thence again to look down upon the busy panorama of the market place, north to where the walled city tumbled down the hill from the mosque and the *casbah* which stands upon the summit, beyond the city, across the blue bay, eastward to the purple-brown Anghera Hills, as quiet and peaceful as if they did not shelter brown men to whom the vaunted independence of the Occident would have been more than iron shackles on wrist and ankle.

BUT even as his feet moved forward a hand fell lightly upon his arm, and he turned to look into sapphire eyes in an old gray-bearded face surmounted by a vast green turban.

"*Mahikbabik*. Welcome," said the ancient of the green turban. "Sidi Abbas welcomes you to Tangier."

"I thank you, *sidi*," answered Travers gravely, but puzzled.

His quick glance took in the voluminous green robe, the stout, iron-tipped staff and again the green turban, all of which marked this man as one of the living saints who are to be found in Morocco. Sidi Abbas was his name, although punning friends made of it 'L'abas—a blessing which he was wont to use and which expressed the hope, "May nothing wrong come upon you."

A man of some mystery, Sidi Abbas, to those who pondered much upon native affairs; to others only a holy man who won his living by conferring blessings upon the worthy, by wishing that no evil might befall even the unworthy, by rubbing the sore eyes of babies with his healing finger tips or by expectorating upon an aching tooth, thereby bringing relief to the sufferer; or perhaps prescribing for those women who greatly desired children who had not come, a pinch of gold dust for the well-to-do, or the scrapings of rhinoceros horn for the poor, or a trip to the tomb of Sidi el-Tebib and prayer thereat for both—in return for all of which he received an occasional coin from those who had silver and from the others fruit and vegetables, a loaf of bread or a cheese or some other trifle. But the blessing of "*'L'abas, 'l'abas*" which he bestowed upon the poor woman who brought him a penny loaf was just as hearty and just as sincere as upon her who brought him a silver coin.

The green-turbaned head towering above Travers fell close.

"If you have interest in the business of mines, be careful."

The voice of the saint was almost a whisper.

Travers looked at him sharply.

"My business is not secret," he said. "I *am* interested in the concession."

"I know. I know," replied Sidi Abbas, nodding his old head. "That is why I say, be careful."

"But—how do you know?"

Travers was surprized, in spite of his knowledge of the swiftness with which facts become known in Morocco.

"All knowledge passes through the Place of the Three Gates," replied Sidi Abbas, the deep lines of his face deepening still farther in a smile. "And so, have a care for yourself. When tigers seek food, man is in danger."

"I understand," said Travers, "and I thank you. But of course, I knew. *Baracalofric—wa selaama.*"

Sidi Abbas raised his right hand in a gesture of blessing and adieu.

"*'L'abas,*" he said. "*'L'abas*—may no harm come to you."

As Travers resumed he reviewed, as from days long gone, some of the incidents of only a few weeks before, when "Emperor" Lee, president of the All-American Metals Company, had demanded that he go to Morocco to secure for his company the mining concession for Zemmur Province—had not only requested, but had stormed when he, knowing to what such a mission would expose him, had refused to go. Only when from the lips of the president of the All-American had fallen a certain name had he consented.

"Maurice de Beaumont," Lee had said, "is representing the French interests desiring the concession."

Then Travers had stood stock still, his hands clenched, his jaws set and his eyes narrowed. In his head, observed by inner vision as it flashed upon the screen of memory, a scenario from the past had marched. De Beaumont's evil, handsome face smiling maliciously at him from every scene. His own search for gold in Morocco—gold that he knew was there. His growing friendship for a people who had fallen victim to the plots and intrigues of European politicians and exploiters; his attempts to interfere with the base schemes of de Beaumont and his followers; the failure of his plans through a well-placed lie of the Frenchman; the efforts to drive him from the country; the attempts upon his life—shots in the dark, the knife of a fanatical native raised against him, and at last the poisoned wine glass, from which he escaped only at the cost of a friend's life. And, most important of all, the constant danger to all of his native friends, which had caused him, for their sakes, to leave the country despite de Beaumont's open sneers of cowardice and laughter of ridicule. He saw later a picture of de Beaumont, grown too callous to public opinion, too dangerous even for the French Foreign Office to use, called back to Paris. But now— Some years had passed; apparently de Beaumont had regained at least a little favor. And he was to secure the concession for his country——

"He is, is he?" Travers had growled. "I'll go," he had said. "Let's get busy."

And now had come his first warning concerning the dangers which he had known would await him in that land of African sunshine.

III

TANGIER by starlight bears little resemblance to the city of sunlight. The sinking of the sun behind the western hills is not only a signal for the *moghreb*, or evening prayer, but also for the ceasing of the day's occupations. Heavy wooden doors of the little shops along the main street are closed with hollow reverberations and the rattling of many padlocks upon iron staples; the traffic dwindles away swiftly; the Great Market Place empties of its throngs, save for those wretched venders who dwell in a few gunnysacking tents about the sacred walls of the tomb of Sidi Mekfi, leaving the *sôk* to them and to a host of pariah dogs and perhaps to a caravan of tired camels in from Fez with their bags of grain. The tranquillity of the evening prayer descends.

Later perhaps, after darkness has come, one or two little camp-fires may spring up in the market place, showing the dusky faces of travelers surrounded by their animals and goods. Even the Place of the Three Gates becomes deserted, save for a slouching, red-coated guard sitting upon a bench in a niche beside the great doors of the Gate, square tin lantern, with colored glasses, upon the seat at his side. Little rectangles of yellow light here and there among the shuttered shops around the *sôko's* edge or upon the road leading to the Marshan, coupled with the monotonous strum of the three-stringed *gimbri*, mark the native coffee houses, the only sign of convivial night life among the Moors.

The *Sôco-Chico* offers, however, a different scene, for here the European cafés are, and to them throng foreign residents and tourists, seeking pleasure among the cosmopolitan crowds which patronize these places. The Café Aleman on one side of the *sôk* has its German name offset upon the other side by the French Café de la Paix and the Spanish Café Español—a trio offering, in their trade rivalry, a miniature of the rivalry of their nations for Moroccan control.

The only spot in Tangier which is well-lighted and which is the starting-place for those tourists who wish to explore the city at night, to seek the thrills of the *casbah* or of those native coffee houses conducted for the tourist, or who desire to verify—or the contrary—the reports concerning the Moorish dancing girls—the little market offers to the onlooker a crazy mixture of every nationality of Europe, together with white Moors and brown ones, shaven-headed Berbers, black Sudanese, Jews in every condition of affluence and poverty, dignified native officials wrapped in white *k'sas*, the froth and the substance and the dregs of local humanity.

Travers found a little, white-topped table in a corner of the veranda of the Café Aleman and ordered a whisky and soda. He sipped his drink and drew lazily at a cigaret, enjoying every sound, every figure, every flash of color. From his vantage point all three cafés and their patrons, as well as the people passing back and forth in the little square, were visible to him; and among them he recognized many men whom he had remembered, and many he had forgotten entirely.

He drew a deep breath. It was a sigh of contentment. How many hundreds of times had he sat for an hour or two in the evening in this same chair, at this same table! He thought whimsically that it had been waiting, vacant, for him; that perhaps no other person had used it during his absence; so personal, so individual, do inanimate things become to us at times.

A white figure clattered through the *sôk* mounted upon a white mule laden with a great, silken-covered saddle and silken trappings. A soldier ran at either stirrup, shouting:

"*Balak! Balak!* Make way for the master."

As he passed he turned his head toward the café, and Travers saw his face.

"Zirhoni!" he murmured to himself.

"Two guards. Zirhoni has come up in the world!"

He watched the white figure on the white mule until the darkness enfolded it. Zirhoni—an assumed name—an Algerian adventurer who had absconded with some railway moneys in Egypt and come with it to Tangier to make his fortune. He was following the highway of success, a highway in which he found no obstructions of conscience or scruple, and his last step had made him a member of the committee in charge of the mining concession.

TRAVERS' thoughts were interrupted by a tall, gray-bearded man in evening dress, who ascended the steps to the veranda of the café, looked about him, and catching sight of Travers, came toward him, hanging his stick upon his arm and removing his soft straw hat.

"Well, well, my boy! So you are back among the infidels."

Travers rose and grasped the offered

hand, looking into the gray eyes set deeply and wide apart in a wrinkled face, half-concealed by a Vandyke white beard. Thick, snowy hair, long and brushed straight back from his high forehead, gave a leonine appearance to his face.

"Jamieson! By all that's good!" exclaimed Travers. "Gollies, I'm glad to see you again, old man! Sit down! Have a drink! Have two drinks! You're the last man I expected to see. Supposed you were in Mogador, as usual."

The older man, his face bearing a smile of enjoyment which was mirrored in Travers' own, pulled up a chair and gave an order to the waiter, who had approached.

"What are you doing up here?" asked Travers as they clicked glasses and grinned in friendship over them.

"Well," answered Jamieson, "you see, I would like to answer that question, but I can't. What I mean to say is that I don't know. So long as I know your business here I don't mind telling you that I am supposed to be here in connection with this much-talked-of mining concession. Same as you are."

"Oh, so?"

Travers looked keenly at his friend; he knew through much experience that a very great knowledge of Moroccan affairs, acquired by thirty years of life in the country, had given his friend certain peculiar thought processes, which, coupled with the whimsical humor, often made it difficult, if not impossible, to draw conclusions from his words.

"I would think," he offered, "that if you had anything to do with the concession you would have your hands full."

"Oh no, not at all," objected Jamieson. "You see, *amigo*, it's this way. I am supposed to represent England in the matter; our *bashador* here picked on me, I suppose, because he knew that I was so lazy that I would not do anything. And, having been given to understand that that was precisely the result he wanted, I was not averse to taking the assignment. It's purely a question of 'face,' in the Chinese meaning of the expression. We do not want the concession, would not have the concession under any circumstances, and our only effort will be to keep from getting it; nevertheless No. 10 Downing Street believes that for the glory of the Empire it must have a representative to look into the matter, and to report on the matter, and discuss the matter—and finally to forget the matter entirely. Ah, my boy, the workings of our Foreign Office are indeed weird and wonderful!"

"*Ajuba bizef!*" agreed Travers. "Your job then, I take it, is to parade the lion's skin."

A smile flickered on his lips, and Jamieson caught it.

"I know the fable, young man; I know the fable. But this time it is a much wiser animal, I think, and one which will neither bray nor roar. But you, I suppose—or shall I say the United States of America?—are in earnest. Yes?"

"Oh, you are posted then?" asked Travers.

"Assuredly. Assuredly. As a matter of fact I believe it was known yesterday—even before your arrival, you see—that you were coming to bid on the concession for an American corporation. I sympathize with you. I should not, I think, wager a very large amount on your good fortune. The cards are—er—stacked against you."

"But of course," agreed Travers. "The cards are always stacked against you in this country. I know. Nevertheless——"

He paused to light another cigaret. Jamieson looked at him and grinned benevolently.

"Nevertheless," he repeated, "you are going to make your play for the stakes. You are aware that if you get off with your life you are lucky, and knowing this, are perfectly willing to get into the game. I know you, and I have not forgotten other days. All very good. All very good. Nevertheless, I feel that I would be errant in my friendship to you if I failed to point out that in my opinion this is the most deadly game that has taken place in Morocco for a generation—and also to inform you that I will take charge of your remains and effects should the occasion arise. Here's hoping it doesn't."

"Always cheerful! Always looking upon the bright side of things!" gibed Travers at his friend. "Always——"

He paused as a huge negro swathed in voluminous black sateen garments ascended the steps and took a seat at a table in the far corner.

"Who is that?"

"That," replied Jamieson, "is a comparative newcomer to Tangier. He came from nowhere, so far as is known. His name is Habib, but he is better known as the

Black Magician, or the Master of the *Djinnoon.* He claims to have some thousands of millions of *djinnoon* to do his bidding, and is therefore very powerful. I have learned upon one or two occasions, however, that he has a knowledge of affairs which is much more practical than spiritual. In short, I know nothing about im."

"The Master of the *Djinnoon*," Travers repeated the title. "Works on the superstition of the natives and gets what he can out of it; is that the idea?"

"To some extent perhaps," answered Jamieson; "but not much, I think. In fact he is a mystery. Every now and then, but only when he feels like it, I hear, he accepts invitations from some of the foreign diplomats to attend their *soirées* and do stunts for them. They say he is good; I have never seen him at work. But I am told that a few days ago at the house of the British Consul he materialized a six-foot snake from the bodice of Madame Blanc's gown, as a result of which the madame went into hysterics. Oh, you'll hear some weird stories about him while you are here—and probably most of them won't be true."

He looked at his watch and rose.

"I've got to be toddling," he said. "I have a date at the Hotel Cecil pretty soon. You are stopping at the Cavilla? Good. I'll look you up tomorrow if you are going to be there."

"Come for lunch," invited Travers. "I'll look for you."

"Can't do it; but later, with pleasure. Ta-ta—and watch where you put your foot."

AS JAMIESON left the veranda a native strode past him and into the café. Travers, watching the Master of the *Djinnoon*, saw him lean forward and peer after the Moor for a little space. The waiter came out, picked up the glass which Jamieson had used and asked:

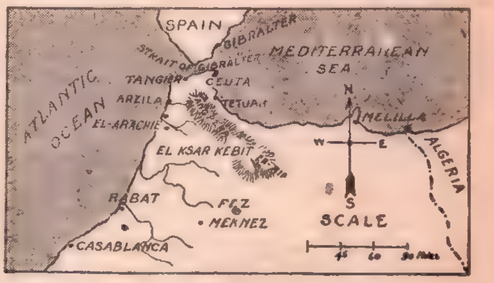
"Do you wish your glass refilled, sir?"

Absent-mindedly Travers nodded; his thoughts concerned the Black Magician, his vast black figure and his face of strange force. The waiter, returning, set the glass upon the table and withdrew. Travers, lighting a cigaret, saw the black figure rise and come toward him. He supposed him to be leaving, and so turned his attention to his drink.

But instead of descending the steps the Black Magician strode toward him with a mysterious swishing of his black draperies, like the whispering of the *djinnoon* he claimed to command, and raised a warning hand. He stopped at a little distance, pointed to the drink, and shook his head. Then turned and went swiftly away, leaving Travers gazing after him with a perplexity which, as his eyes returned to the whisky and soda before him, turned into grim understanding.

He leaned over and emptied the contents of his glass slowly. Then he raised the glass to the light and looked through it. A residue of white particles coated the bottom of the glass. He tossed it into the street which ran beside the café, and rose.

"Our old favorite, arsenic," he said to himself. "And our mysterious black magician seems to have acted as guardian angel. I guess the place for James J. to-night is his little white bed at the hotel."



He descended the steps and crossed the *sôk*, thinking somewhat of his narrow escape, but more of the Master of the *Djinnoon.* Where the street enters the market place he heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs upon the cobbles and stepped to one side of the road to permit the horseman to pass. An ancient electric bulb high in the air created a faint yellow mist in the darkness—sufficient, however, for him to recognize the horseman and for the horseman to recognize him.

The rider was de Beaumont, and at sight of him Travers' hands and jaws instinctively clenched. A feeling swept over him that the poisoned drink had been offered him at the instigation of this smiling horseman, who removed his hat and bowed in mock politeness. Yet on the heels of it, a long-standing habit of fair play refused to accept the knowledge without further evidence. He, too, removed his hat and smiled as he returned the greeting. But that de Beaumont was still his enemy became very evident in the words which followed.

"Welcome to Tangier," said de Beaumont. "I am sure you find it—quite unchanged."

Travers merely bowed in reply, and the Frenchman touched spur to his horse. The intent of the words was obvious to the American; he had left an enemy in Tangier; his return found his enemy an enemy still.

IV

ALTHOUGH the American had left the Little Market Place, the weaving of the web from which he had just escaped continued. The Frenchman dismounted before the big Café Aleman and threw the reins to one of the crowd of urchins hanging about waiting for a chance to earn a penny, honestly or otherwise. He lighted a cigaret slowly while his eyes searched the open room; then, acknowledging greetings as he passed among the tables, he proceeded to a corner where sat a portly man wearing a white *sulham* thrown over his European clothing. He wore spectacles with thick lenses which diminished the size of his gray eyes and sharpened their irises almost to pinpoints. He was a man of perhaps sixty; his face, smooth shaven save for gray mustache, was ruddy, as was also the top of his head, which was nearly bald. The face was strong and massive, giving an impression of having been molded roughly of red clay. The nose was not curved, yet there was an unmistakable touch of the Hebrew in the features.

He rose to return de Beaumont's greeting, without a flicker of expression save an almost indistinguishable lowering or contracting of the eyelids. His French was as faultless as de Beaumont's own.

"Will you not join me"? he invited and waved a hand toward a vacant chair—a hand which was astonishingly white and graceful, whereas one would have expected the man's full-bloodedness to make it red and plump. A magnificent diamond, too big to be in good taste, gleamed upon one finger.

"With pleasure, my friend," replied de Beaumont.

They sat down, de Beaumont's host drawing his *sulham* about him with a gesture which expressed both dignity and, inexplicably, the drawing about him of a protecting mantle.

"Always, I believe," remarked de Beaumont, "Herr Feldmann occupies this same table. It is well to have one reserved. And this, I have observed, occupies a valuable strategic position." He turned and swept the café with his look.

Feldmann nodded deliberate agreement.

"That is true," he said. "From here it is easy to see when one's friends enter—or one's enemies."

No change of feature, nor look, accompanied the words to suggest that they held a double meaning. Swiftly de Beaumont returned the ball.

"It has also the advantage that your friends may easily find you, as I have just now proved."

Now the German's eyes found de Beaumont's, and his lips twitched faintly.

"I had you in mind in what I said."

De Beaumont laughed gaily.

"*Touché!* But although we must be rated as opponents in this matter of the concession, I fail to perceive the necessity for us to be enemies. There is a difference."

"Quite so," assented the German. "But sometimes it is difficult to see where one ends and the other begins. Especially in Morocco," he added as an after thought. "However, we are neither of us children, and there is little danger of either of us misjudging the other."

They saluted each other over the drinks which had been brought and were silent for a space. Then de Beaumont led a card in a new trick.

"Concerning the matter of the concession," he observed, "it would seem now as though the matter was not entirely in our hands."

Feldman shrugged his *sulhamed* shoulders.

"All matters are in the hands of Allah," he said, "including the concession."

"That may be true," assented the Frenchman. "But whereas heretofore the matter has been in the hands of you and myself and Allah, it is now in the hands of four parties."

"Four, or forty. What is written must be."

De Beaumont looked at him sharply, noting the apparent lack of interest, the stolidity, the evident calm, which could indicate only one thing—that his opponent believed that the concession was already in the hands of the Mannheim Brothers, whom he represented, and who were the firm selected by the Kaiser himself to represent Germany. And despite the belief which he had held that between himself and this man whom he faced, his own plans must win, he was suddenly conscious of a shiver of doubt. The German was so stolid, so fatalistically assured, so seemingly immovable—an obstacle in his path which had unexpectedly assumed impressive dimensions. And with the fear, like its shadow came the reaction natural to him—a quick conscienceless, brutal, personal enmity, a sweeping physical desire to kill as the quickest, safest way to solve his problem. Almost as if reading his thoughts—perhaps he did read them, for he had spent a lifetime among Oriental believers in the occult—the German spoke.

' All things are in the hands of Allah—and death among them."

The Frenchman tensed, then laughed, but a little harshly, and raised his glass to his lips.

"Of course," he agreed then evenly; "but death is a hidden danger. The American is not a hidden danger. He has vast wealth behind him. As much, I should say, as you have—or I; perhaps more."

The German shook his head ponderously in negation.

"Behind me," he said, spacing his words impressively, "is all the wealth of the German Empire. Behind you is—enough. That is not the entire question—the amount of the bid. For example, I—" he met the eyes of the Frenchman squarely—"I might underbid you and still gain the concession. Or you might underbid me——"

"And still not gain the concession," offered de Beaumont.

"Precisely."

De Beaumont shrugged.

"Nevertheless, the American is a menace to us both. I know him. He is clever. I knew him some years ago. He knows this country. He lived here three years. I repeat, he is a danger to both of us. Between us three Allah chooses. *Bien!* But why offer Him *three* to choose from?"

Still the German shook his head in disagreement.

"I do not consider him a danger," he said. "Of course, I may be wrong. I might suddenly find myself to be wrong. In which case—in which case——"

He paused to light a cigaret and then apparently forgot what he was saying. De Beaumont reminded him.

"In which case—" he suggested.

"Oh, then I should—ahem—take steps."

De Beaumont thought swiftly. He was not deceived as to what these steps might be. He recognized in the German ruthlessness, a will, as cruel as his own, and suddenly the fear of him came back. But hand in hand with it came an idea. He pondered it for a moment and it became a resolution. He leaned forward across the table and lowered his voice almost to a whisper.

"I do not believe that the American will live to submit his bid."

The German returned him look for look.

"I should not grieve, assuredly," he said, "if such were the case."

"Between us—" began de Beaumont, and paused significantly.

His eyes searched the face of the man across the table for any revealing trace of thought. But the German only said gently, with a rising inflection:

"Between us——?"

De Beaumont clenched his hand upon the table until the knuckles showed white and looked upon it.

"That," he said.

But the German shook his head.

"I do not feel that you and I should work together in such a matter. There might—" he hesitated for the word, and his thick lips quirked—"there might be complications," he concluded.

The implication was clear, and resentment shook the Frenchman—not resentment because the German had so plainly intimated his fear of being betrayed, but because he had seen into his mind.

"Very well, then," he said, his voice grating. "Very well, I will make this bargain with you then, if you do not wish to work with me: I will attempt first to do that which I think is necessary. If I fail—it will be your turn. *Hein?*"

While de Beaumont's heart beat a dozen times the German gazed with lowered eyelids at the empty glass in his hand. Then he nodded slowly and met de Beaumont's sinister stare.

"Agreed," he said. "If you fail. But I do not think you will fail. Unless——"

He did not finish the thought, and the Frenchman prompted him.

"Unless— What would you say?"

The German shrugged heavily; but his look did not meet de Beaumont's.

"Nothing, my friend," he lied. "I should have said, *inshallah*—if Allah wills."

V

MORNING brought gray, low-lying clouds from the sea with threats of rain.

Travers, disposing of a late breakfast at a table before a window in the hotel dining room opening upon the market place, felt something of the depression which gray days bring to most people. Nor had his thoughts since awakening been wholly cheerful. On the preceding night the poisoned drink had been too near to causing more than anger; but even anger had been lessened by curiosity as to how and why the mysterious black figure known as the Master of the *Djinnoon* had saved him.

He had fallen asleep pondering the puzzle, and as far from reaching any logical conclusion as when he started. He had slept well, and with his awakening the live curiosity had gone, giving place to a slight nausea, and a certain picture in his mind. He had seen men die of poisoning, and it had not been pretty.

Unfortunately poison and the knife are the favorite means of assassination and murder in Morocco. Wise natives, whose lives are of importance, are very careful as to where and with whom they drink tea, and to share another's beverage is a token of trust.

But although the use of arsenic is a marked Moorish idiosyncracy, Travers was not under the misapprehension that its usage was confined to the natives; he was well aware that the custom had been adopted by certain Europeans in the country, although he could yet recall the amazed disbelief of earlier years, until he had been convinced even against his will. Even yet he felt a physical illness, no more at the thought of the poison than at the thought of what a European must be who would resort to such a method. His intelligence told him that after all if one man was going to kill another the method really was of no great importance—at least to the victim—but the stigma of cowardice which the Occident has placed upon this particular means overcame his logic.

He berated himself for being fool enough to take a drink in a public café, the situation being what he knew it to be, but defended himself with the thought that no one would have expected such prompt action from one's opponents. That his life would be in danger in his undertaking, he knew. But, he thought, there had really been no need for the attempt to be made within a few hours after his arrival. It was indecorous haste, he thought, and smiled whimsically.

And as to who was responsible for it—he might as well try to solve offhand the problem of the fourth dimension or the squaring of the circle. Instinctively he felt that de Beaumont, who was not only a business opponent but a personal enemy, was guilty of the act.

But although he could not put this feeling away from him, his sense of justice and a due regard for his future safety forced him to recognize the fact that there were others who might have been responsible.

De Beaumont he knew, and knew that such a move was not beneath him; but there were others to be considered. There was the German, Herr Feldmann, whom he did not know, but of whom he had learned that he was a German Jew who had spent most of his long life working for the Fatherland among Oriental peoples, and that he was almost as much Moor, or Turk, or Armenian, or Hindu, as those people themselves. Wherefore, poisoning being an Oriental trick, it was only reasonable to argue that the most Oriental-minded of his enemies would have been responsible for the attempt upon his life. Besides which the attempt took place in the German café.

And upon the heels of this thought came another: He might have enemies or opponents among the natives themselves. The granting of a concession to any foreign nation was extremely unpopular in certain quarters, as a result of which some patriotically inclined native might have taken upon himself to eliminate the foreign representatives. And still further, both French and German agents would have native employees and friends. Travers did not deceive himself into thinking that all the natives were above serving the foreigner against their own country.

And finally—what did the Black Magician know, and how did he know it, and why did he interfere? Which was an insoluble problem at the present, at least.

As he reached this conclusion he saw passing on the road which leads through the market place a green-robed, green-turbaned, white-bearded ancient, shuffling along with the aid of a long staff. Sidi Abbas, the Green Saint, it was, and with the vision an additional factor was thrown into the already insoluble problem: Sidi Abbas had warned him, and within half an hour after he had arrived.

"I'll say," murmured Travers, "that Morocco hasn't changed much. Green Saints whispering warnings, Black Magicians saving my life, de Beaumont and Feldmann assuredly plotting against me, and Allah only knows how many others. And that old "sage of Mogador," Jamieson, offering to take charge of what's left—all in less than half a day. Oh, well, I hope I haven't forgotten all the fatalism which I acquired during my previous sojourn here, because I reckon that what Allah wills is sure coming to pass. Wonder what a new day will bring forth."

He abandoned his soliloquy as a spirited bay horse galloped up to the hotel, ridden by a well-dressed young Moor who inquired loudly for the American *sidi*. Travers called to him, and the youth came to the barred window, leading the horse.

"This horse, him for you, sir," said the youth.

"But," objected Travers, "I have already told another boy to bring me a horse."

"Yes, me know. Other boy, him Bigote, him sick in his house. No can come. Him say me bring horse. Me work with you. Me good boy. Me Larbi. Work one time for Sekerty Bashador Belgique."

"Oh, you did, eh? Worked for the Secretary of the Belgian Minister, eh? What for you stop?"

"Him die," answered Larbi. "Him ride horse too fast one time; horse fall. *Bam!* No more sekerty. Breakum neck."

Travers laughed. The swift down and up lift of the youth's freehand describing the "*Bam!*" painted a picture not only of the broken neck, but somehow of the secretary then ascending into the hereafter like a skyrocket.

"This, I hope, is not the same horse," said Travers.

"Oh, no! No! This good horse. This horse no hurt nobody. Never. But I think maybe you ride bad horse, too. No?"

There was obvious flattery in the words and tone, not intended to be concealed.

"But where is Bigote?" asked Travers. "What's the matter with him?"

The boy shook his head doubtfully.

"Him sick," he repeated. "Got belly pain. Oof! Me think maybe him eat too much. Maybe all right tomorrow. *Inshalla*. But me good boy."

Now Travers dismissed the English language and spoke in Arabic.

"Very well. We will see. I do not want the horse just yet. You ride down to Toledano's tobacco shop and buy me a box of cigarets. This kind." He handed the boy a cigaret from his case. "A box of a hundred. Here is the money."

The boy took the cigaret, mounted the horse with an easy swing and clattered off through the *sôk*, while Travers resumed his breakfast, still amused at the humorous picture the boy had conjured up of a rather gruesome incident.

Neither Travers nor his newly appointed groom noted that as Larbi rode off, a brown figure which had been squatting lazily at the corner of a little coffee house called "El Mochingo" rose and yawned and stretched and then shuffled quickly after the horseman. Nor did Larbi take note of the fact that while he was purchasing the cigarets this same figure wandered up and observed the transaction from the doorway. When Larbi had remounted and started back to the hotel the brown figure went a little farther along the street and entered the shop where Hadj Hamed squatted among the *djellabas* and *sulhems* and slippers.

Hadj Hamed looked up at him with eyebrows raised in question.

"Yesterday the American ordered Cassim, who is called Bigote, that this morning he should bring to the hotel a horse for his use, and also that he should serve him. This morning comes another, who proclaims himself as Larbi, saying that Bigote is ill of a belly pain or some such matter, and has sent him in his stead, together with the horse. The American, believing this to be true, permits this Larbi to serve him."

"But why not?" asked Hadj Hamed. "It is not unusual for a boy to be sick."

"That is true," agreed Mustapha. "Assuredly that is true. If Bigote were really ill all would be in order. But——"

"But what?" interrupted Hadj Hamed.

Mustapha shrugged his shoulders and grinned a little.

"This morning I saw Bigote being taken to the jail. It is said he had stolen something from a shop—but this need not be true, of course."

Hadj Hamed crinkled his forehead in surprize.

"We may judge then," he observed, "that Larbi has told a lie to the American, and also that he has done so for a purpose. Obviously he is a spy. But—" his voice grew sharp—"you say he is Larbi. Who is Larbi?"

Mustapha shrugged his shoulders.

"*Y'allah!* I don't know. I have never seen him before. I overheard him saying that his name was Larbi. But he is not of Tangier. I know everybody in Tangier."

"Humph!" Hadj Hamed's grunt was expressive of many things. "There remains then, for you to discover who he is and what he is, whom he is working for—and other things. And also——"

Hadj Hamed lowered his voice still further, and his speech was swift. At its conclusion Mustapha nodded understanding.

"Go then," ordered Hadj Hamed.

Mustapha stepped from the shop and headed for the Great Market Place.

Arriving at the hotel, he discovered by discreet inquiries from an old beggar who haunted the entrance that the Sidi American had ridden away on his horse, and that the boy called Larbi had disappeared in what the beggar indicated by a wave of a clawlike hand, to be the general direction of the Ville de France. Further inquiry from the hotel waiter, no excuse for the inquiry being necessary, developed that Travers had gone to the American Consulate, in view of which knowledge Mustapha seated himself alongside the ancient beggar to wait.

Very shortly he described Larbi swinging through the *sôk*. That he was going somewhere on a mission was evidenced to Mustapha's observing eyes by the fact that his steps were perhaps two inches longer and a fifth of a second quicker than if he had been strolling with no definite end in view. Mustapha watched him until he was out of sight and then entered the hotel, seeking Abdeslam, the waiter, who was a friend of his.

VI

THE luncheon hour brought rain, a slow drizzle that emptied streets and market places, except for those whose business affairs, or whose dispositions, caused them to ignore the dampness. Jamieson, "the sage of Mogador" as Travers had called him, found his American friend pacing restlessly about his big living room, his mood in thorough accord with the weather. He brightened visibly under the genial influence of the Englishman.

He was acquainted with Jamieson's rule never to drink before luncheon—but he also knew from experience that by two o'clock in the afternoon his friend had attained an attitude of beneficence toward the world. Beyond a pinkening of the skin beneath his white beard, a friendliness toward all humanity and a sharpening of the already keen mind, liquor had no effect upon the Englishman, even though he consistently consumed whisky and sodas from luncheon until bedtime. A congenial soul, unirritable and suave even in the cold gray dawn, mid afternoon inevitably found him at peace with the universe and in full enjoyment of a brilliant mind.

Steeped in Moroccan life for thirty years, he offered a startling example of the persistency of the inherited Occidental mind traveling side by side, hand in hand, with an acquired Oriental mentality. In his younger days he had dreamed splendid dreams of a new empire in southern Morocco; elderly now, he painted dreams for others. And in his heart was a love for the empire of the Moors which upon many an occasion had made of him a valiant warrior against the intrigues of the vulture, Europe.

Travers seated him in a big wicker chair, set a tall glass upon the arm and siphoned soda into it; then seated himself. They raised their glasses and drank.

"Ah-h—*draffat!*" murmured Jamieson. "The perfect drink. Far superior to champagne. Besides, the French drink champagne—and I do not like the French. Better than Gordon Dry, although I must admit that Mr. Gordon produces a very excellent elixir for the soul."

Travers smiled. He recalled the ceremony with which his friend, when drinking gin, was wont to line the glass. He would drop into it an amount of bitters which, upon trial, proved to be just sufficient completely to cover the glass when it was rolled upon the table. Jamieson would as soon have poured whisky into the soda as to have poured the bitters into the gin. And then, raising the glass inverted and noting that no tiniest excess of bitters edged the rim, he would smile at his own exquisite judgment. Travers always thought of him standing thus, like some genial and venerable Bacchus—even though Jamieson would insist on quoting depressing lines from Omar Khayyam concerning an empty glass.

"Well, my young and esteemed friend," asked Jamieson, "what is in the air today besides the rain? I like the rain," he added inconsequentially. "Especially when I have a most comfortable chair, in most agreeable company, with, as I see a bountiful supply of the perfect drink—it gives the final touch of peace. Why do you snort?"

"Peace about as permanent as that of Europe," Travers said.

"Now that I observe you closely," said Jamieson, "it appears to me there is something distrait about you; that you are perturbed of spirit; that your aura is of a somewhat pale blue instead of a rich crimson. Faded. What's up?"

"Attempt number one, for one thing. Besides which, I have just come from a session with the American Consul, which was—well, to say the least, it wasn't encouraging."

"Attempt number one, eh?" repeated Jamieson. "By which I suppose you mean that somebody has attempted to translate you to a higher sphere. I—I am really glad to see you here," he added; and although the words were light there was sincerity in the tone of his voice. "What—er—means were selected?"

"Poison. Arsenic. Arsenic in a whisky and soda at the Café Aleman last night."

"*Mushi m'zien.*" Jamieson rubbed his beard reflectively. "It's true that such methods are more or less commonplace in this beautiful country—but somehow or other I have never been able to get accustomed to it. It doesn't seem to me to be strictly *en règle*, as it were.

"At the Café Aleman, eh? Of course that proves nothing. For a pound note I could bribe any waiter in the Café Aleman to murder the Kaiser if he got a chance. They are German, and they are working for Germany, of course; but business is business—which means that their activities are not limited. And I suspect the same thing is true of the other cafés. You see—" he grinned cheerfully—"there is no English café here. Wherefore I can say that."

"I don't doubt that you are right. I have nothing to go on—except that it took place at the German café. Of course, as you say, that doesn't argue that a German did it; but neither does it argue that any one else did it."

"How did the plans of these persons unknown—ahem—come to miss fire, as it were? Even an American, I think, can not imbibe arsenic and the next day suffer only from an irritated soul. And by the way— Why, it must have been soon after I left you!"

Travers nodded.

"Yes. The next drink, as a matter of fact. You remember the Master of the *Djinnoon?* Well—" Travers related briefly the strange action of the Black Magician in warning him. He stopped with a shrug. "And that's that. But what is it?"

"The Master of the *Djinnoon,*" repeated Jamieson. "The plot grows in interest. He must have seen something."

"So I judge," agreed Travers. "But how the deuce did he happen to be watching some one particular person at the time when that person was doing the thing that he afterward warned me against? He must have known something before; but how could he? If it had been a native plot, yes. But then he wouldn't have warned me."

"I'm not so sure of that," objected Jamieson. "You want to remember that there is more than one faction among the natives. He might have learned of a plot against you and decided to queer it. But that leaves a plenty to be explained."

"I'll say it does!" Travers was emphatic.

"And what about the American Consul?" asked Jamieson.

"Oh—it wasn't so important; merely irritating. Just to know how I stood in this matter I inquired of him as to how the good work could go on for my company in case I should be—eliminated. He said it couldn't; the Consulate wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole. Also, I asked him what he could do for my protection in case I found it necessary myself to eliminate some of these folks who are so handy with arsenic. Nothing, again.

"Of course I knew that he could not protect me—that nobody could—against these people; but it made me sore to discover that if one of them got me there would be no come-back, and if I got one of them in self-defense, I would probably have to fight it out in their own courts. Fat chance there!"

"In short, you are on your own, more or less denationalized while you are on this job," offered Jamieson. "Have to take your chances and make the other fellow take his."

"That's about it, as I get it."

"Well," Jamieson continued, "there are reasons for that, of course. It leaves you—well—freer of action, for one thing, even though it leaves the other the same way. This thing is not only a matter of business, as I don't need to tell you. The forces are too big, the interests involved are too important, to be restricted by law; when one plays for empires one's head is the stake. And there is no doubt in the world that if you were assassinated by French or German or native agent, the only reply to any move your Government might make would be for the French or German or Moroccan to be repudiated by his own Government. You are in the same boat—and it's a great life!

"Seriously—I have no doubt but what your life will be in danger every moment. I know that won't frighten you; I've seen you in action—but you will do well never to forget it."

"I do realize it," said Travers. "But that wasn't what depressed me. Nobody would get very far if his first consideration was for his life. But it gave me a pain to talk to the American Consul— And this rain! Oh the ——! Let's have another drink."

He filled the glasses and snapped open his cigaret case. Only two cigarets remained.

"I have a box here somewhere," he said, offering one to Jamieson and lighting the other.

There was a knock upon the door.

"*Ajhi*," he called.

A Moorish boy, a servant of the hotel, entered with a fresh bottle of soda. As the boy turned to depart Travers called to him:

"Here. Before you go, hand me that box of cigarets from the table."

The boy brought him the box.

"*Tom uno*," said Travers to the boy. "Take one."

The boy's face broke into a broad grin; he ducked his head in thanks and left the room. Travers absentmindedly noted the scratching of a match outside the door through which the boy had just passed, and reflected that the boy had seated himself upon the steps ascending near the door.

"What do you really know about this mysterious Black Magician?" he asked Jamieson.

"Just what I told you last night. I have heard things—utterly preposterous things—and things which are not so utterly preposterous. But the only thing that is certain is that he is a very efficient magician equipped with a surprizing knowledge—surprizing, I say!—of people and events, and that as a prophet he is altogether too good to be explained by guesswork.

"I have no evidence whatever that he is anything except what he claims to be—" Jamieson smiled a little—"a magician with unlimited power over unlimited millions of *djinnoon*, by whose aid he works wonders. But you know this country. When a man is too well posted upon matters which are supposed to be grave diplomatic secrets—one suspects."

"In other words he might be an agent for any one or any nation, using his magic as a cloak?"

"Precisely," agreed Jamieson. "He *might* be."

"And what, by the way," asked Travers, changing the topic, "has become of the famous Mohamed Ali?"

Jamieson shrugged his shoulders.

"His Majesty the Sultan would give much for the answer to that question. His throne would be more secure, I think, if Mohammed Ali's head were over the Fez gate, instead of functioning perfectly somewhere in the Riffian hills. He's outlaw, of course; but an active one. Somehow I have a kindly feeling toward him, in spite——"

A CRASH against the door, followed by a low moan, brought both men to their feet. Travers unlatched the door, and the writhing body of the hotel boy rolled at his feet. A quarter-smoked cigaret sent up a little question mark of blue smoke beside him. Travers stooped and tried to raise the boy, but he was in convulsions.

"Bring some whisky!" he cried to Jamieson.

The Englishman returned swiftly with a glass. They tried to force it between the boy's teeth, but they were clenched. As they attempted to pry his mouth open the boy gave a sudden shriek, stiffened and then flattened upon the floor peculiarly, like a toy balloon which has been punctured. Travers, kneeling, stared at him open-mouthed, looked up at Jamieson bending over and saw amazement in the Englishman's eyes. Then the older man knelt also and felt the boy's heart.

"Dead," he said. "Dead. And in less than three minutes. Whew-w!"

He reached over to pick up the burning cigaret, carefully extinguished the glowing embers and dropped it into his pocket. Then they summoned the hotel proprietor, and they carried the body of the boy and placed it upon a bed in one of the unoccupied rooms, while a doctor was summoned by the proprietor—needlessly, as both Travers and Jamieson knew.

Silent and cold, the American and the Englishman returned to the former's quarters. There Jamieson took from his pocket the remainder of the cigaret the boy had been smoking. He gazed at it earnestly for a little space, then met Travers' eyes.

"I think, my friend, that one of us, or perhaps both, were very fortunate that you had two cigarets left in your pocket case."

"Good God!" exclaimed Travers. "Do you think——"

"I may be mistaken. But what else could have caused it? Where did you get those cigarets?"

Travers told him, adding—

"I opened the box myself—it was sealed—before I went to the Consulate this morning."

He picked up the box and looked at it.

"It is the same box; or at least the same kind. Wait. Let's see something."

He emptied the cigarets upon the table.

"My case holds fourteen cigarets. It was entirely empty. I filled it from the box. I have smoked none except those I put in the case. That makes fifteen cigarettes, with the one I gave the boy— What a ghastly thing!—fifteen cigarets—so there should be eighty-five left. Of course one of the servants might have helped himself to one or two."

He counted swiftly.

"Eighty-six," he announced.

"*Eighty-six!*" exclaimed Jamieson. "Eighty-six, you say? You are sure?"

"I'll count them again," said Travers, and did so. "Eighty-six is right."

"Then," demanded Jamieson, "where did the eighty-sixth one come from?"

Travers stared at him blankly for a moment; then the significance of the count crashed upon him.

"Why," he stammered, "why—it means—that some one has put another cigaret in—no—it couldn't mean that; there is one cigaret unaccounted for. Nobody would trust to a single cigaret."

"Oh, my boy—don't you see what they have done? But wait. Let us examine these cigarets. First let's look at the one the boy was smoking."

With his penknife Jamieson split the stub and flattened it out upon the table. Then a dozen others. In more than half of them a fine white powder was to be noted. The two men ceased their task and looked at each other, nodding.

"The box was switched on you," offered Jamieson.

"Larbi!" exclaimed Travers, and his eyes grew menacing. "And that poor little kid—But I couldn't know——"

Jamieson put a comforting arm around his shoulder.

"No blame rests upon you, my boy," he said. "It was written that it was to be the boy—and we, all of us, are only servants of Allah."

"But not— I'll find out who did this if it's the last thing I do. I'll find Larbi, and I'll choke it out of him. It must have been Larbi. The people here at the hotel are my friends. It must have been."

Absent-mindedly he stooped to the floor and picked up an object at which he gazed unseeingly for a space. Then his eyes widened. Silently he handed the object to Jamieson. It was a metal military button, apparently pulled from a coat, and it bore the double eagle of Germany. Then anger burst forth again.

"—— him!" he cried. "I'll kill him on sight. I'll kill him for the kid's sake as well as my own. It's his second try—and twice is enough!"

Jamieson knew that he referred to Feldmann—and, being a wise man, did not try to calm his friend nor to question his deductions—just then.

VII

AT DARK that evening Travers set forth upon a peculiar mission, a mission which he had divulged to no one and excused to himself with explanations which were a weird mixture of whimsical humor, derision and seriousness. His steps were bound for the home of the black man who called himself the Master of the *Djinnoon;* and for a twentieth-century American to have traffickings of any sort with a black magician and necromancer, needed, to the mind of that same American, a considerable amount of what psychologists term rationalizing. True enough, he had an excuse for making the visit; courtesy required that he make an early opportunity to thank the black man for his kindly action in warning him against the poisoned drink at the Café Aleman.

Nevertheless Travers realized that he was much impelled by curiosity, by the mystery of the man and his apparently startling knowledge of what was going on, as by the need of expressing his gratitude. The negro's magic he dismissed as being explainable by the usual tricks of magicians the world over; the claim of domination over innumerable *djinnoon* he passed along with a mental shrug, knowing well the native belief not only in the existence but in the activities of spirits, and believing that by claiming dominion over them the negro really added to his influence over the ignorant and superstitious Moors.

But his curiosity had been most keenly aroused by the magician's interference in his affairs and by the references which Jamieson and others had made to the black man's wisdom, to say nothing of the suggestion that his work in Morocco was not entirely confined to the amusing or mystifying.

Travers was too wise, too well versed in the country, to make the mistake of believing that American methods were in order; he knew that to get along in Morocco he must "think Moorish," and thinking Moorish consisted in accepting at a fair value a number of factors which would have been held in disdain by a man unacquainted with the Orient. He knew that beneath the top soil of Moorish life existed a stratum of ancient rock rarely touched by Occidentals, visiting or resident in the country, and he knew that a part of this stratum was a queer mixture of wisdom and superstition, belief in unbelievable things. Leave that factor out of an equation and no foreigner could understand native life nor act intelligently. He suspected that the Black Magician was part of this stratum.

Not that he thought of getting any information of importance to himself. No, Travers realized that he was merely using an opportunity to meet the Black Magician and thereby perhaps to satisfy a profound curiosity concerning him.

A casual inquiry at the hotel had brought out the location of his house, and Travers took his way thither through the dark, deserted streets until he reached an iron-studded door set in a windowless white wall in the *casbah.* The house echoed to the fall of the iron knocking-ring on the door, and after a little while the *swish-swish-swish* of shuffling slippers came to his ears. Bolts slid gratingly, and the door swung open.

"Enter, American," said a deep voice. "It is dark here, but there is light beyond."

Travers was startled at being so quickly recognized in the utter darkness. He himself could see only the faintest outline of the man who spoke; but as he stepped across the doorsill he remembered the white wall across the street and grinned, realizing that eyes inside the house could see his outline against it. Or could they? He turned to look, and was convinced that the man must have cat's eyes to see even an outline. The black was clever, at any rate.

"Be not afraid," said the Magician, rebolting the door, "and please follow."

"What should I fear in the house of one who has protected me?" asked Travers, his Arabic as polite as that of his host.

A few steps he took; a door swung open, exuding light from a room beyond. The massive figure of the Magician cut it off for a moment, and then he stood aside as Travers entered.

"I am honored," said the Magician, bowing, "by your visit to my house. Let us sit here."

He waved a hand toward wide, thick, silken-covered mattresses at one side of the room, before which two great brass candlesticks three feet or more in height held candles as thick as a man's wrist. A thick, big book lay open upon the cushion. And as they seated themselves, crosslegged, the Magician moved it aside.

"I have just been reading in the great book of magic of Sidi Abd-ul-Kereem. It is very interesting—and instructive. Please smoke," he added, apparently divining Travers' thought, or the slight motion he had made toward the pocket containing his cigaret case. "I myself do not smoke, although I find the odor pleasant. But even if I had cigarets I think I should not offer them to you—now."

Travers restrained himself with an effort then asked, looking at the black with as good an expression of puzzlement as he was capable of—

"And why not?"

The Black Magician's smile almost could be called a grin.

"That was well done," he said. "You have good control over your features. What I meant was that I think Sidi Travers might hesitate about accepting cigarets other than his own—considering what occurred this afternoon."

Travers made no attempt now to conceal his emotion. He reflected instantly that of course a small number of people knew of the poisoned cigarets. His surprize was due to the fact that the news had so promptly reached the ears of the man who sat beside him.

"I suppose," he said, "that all Tangier knows of the affair by now."

"On the contrary," objected the magician, "I have been about the city this afternoon and I heard nothing of it."

"Then—how—" asked Travers.

"My *djinnoon* brought me the information, of course."

Travers looked at the black, and both men smiled; but their smiles were different. That of Travers indicated a willingness to accept the *djinnoon* without argument, but with such mental reservations as he wished to make. That of the Black Magician indicated that he understood perfectly how Travers felt about it and had no hard feelings as a result. Almost it was as if the two mutually consented to the playing of a little game of pretend. Nevertheless, it was instantly and vividly evident to Travers that actual denial on his part of his companion's *djinnoon* would cause the game to end. There was that in the magician's eye which said that his *djinnoon* were to be trifled with only very gently.

"They are very efficient, your *djinnoon*," observed Travers, lighting a cigaret from one of the tall candles. "I wish—" He paused, and changed his words. "But I must tell you that I came to thank you for your warning in the German café. Unquestionably it saved my life. I suppose——"

He hesitated, wondering whether the thought would offend or not. The Black Magician answered Travers' unspoken words.

"Of course, my *djinnoon* told me of that also. Thus I was able to turn aside the danger."

"I am very grateful," said Travers, admiring the manner in which the magician had checkmated him, preventing him from asking any further questions concerning the source of his knowledge, thinking that the black's *djinnoon* assuredly were a marvelously efficient invention, if nothing else. "If I may ever serve you in return, I shall be glad."

"It is nothing; it is nothing; but—I will remember what you say," the Black Magician assured him. "I was forewarned also as to the cigarets—and I also knew that they were not to harm you, hence of course there was no need for another word of warning."

Travers could not believe this; believing it would have meant to him nothing less than the black had been concerned in the attempt upon his life. And this he had to reject, because a man does not often save another's life one day to take it away the next. However, he thought, let the pretense pass.

"But," he asked, "then also you could have prevented the death of the boy."

But the Magician was not to be caught in this trap.

"It was written that the boy was thus to die. We can foresee, but we can not altar the Book of Fate."

The American, digesting this, began to feel himself slipping, as it were. He scrambled for a hold upon something tangible.

"Yet you prevented my death," he pointed out.

"True," agreed the Black Magician, "but it was written that you should not die then."

"But," argued Travers, "if you had not interfered I should have died."

The Master of the *Djinnoon* smiled benignly upon him, as a master smiling upon a pupil.

"Ah," he said, "but it was also written

that I should interfere."

Travers gave up then, as all non-fatalists must surrender before the impregnable argument of "*maktoob*—what is written must be." He knew its impregnability, had known it for years; and yet the Occidental in him every now and then forced him up intellectually against the blank, impenetrable wall. Things must be because they are, is the argument behind which no mind can penetrate—the cleverest conception, Travers thought, which had ever occurred to human mind.

" 'He who can read the Book of Fate,' " quoted Travers, " 'must be prepared to suffer as well as to enjoy.' "

The Black Magician nodded his great head slowly, and his eyelids drooped mystically.

"*Aiwa*, that is a true thing. Wherefore I seek to read the future rarely—and with care, stingily. I have known men who read it otherwise and then to have their heads become, as we say of the insane, 'temples wherein God dwells.' "

Travers was beginning to be impressed. This man was no charlatan, regardless of the fact that he might use his tricks of magic and his knowledge of the occult for profit or amusement. Modesty, self-repression, strength of will, do not mark the false prophets or the half-baked occultists with which the world abounds.

Travers did not disbelieve entirely in the occult. He knew that in all the pother about the mystery there was some truth—a dangerous truth to the strong, a fatal truth to the weak. Suspecting, sensing, that this man beside him had probed deeply into that science which is hidden from most men, he suddenly felt a vast admiration for the strength of character which permitted the man to place limitations upon himself and to admit them.

There was much that he could not accept—the *djinnoon*, for example. But there were other things which he could accept—was prepared to accept—occult vision which, he reflected, did not in itself exclude a very practical and highly intelligent normal vision. In short, his estimate of the Black Magician now was that he was a learned and deeply experienced man whose natural faculties were probably added to by occult powers, perfectly understandable by and acceptable to even the modern scientific mind.

TRAVERS came out of his reverie, wondering if the Black Magician had spoken again and he not heard. But a glance at his companion showed that he, too, had been absorbed in his own thoughts.

"I think I understand," said the American. "Even we in America know a little of these things—a very little. And I have lived here before."

"A very little," said the black man, nodding, "is all that any of us know. And I—" he touched the book lying beside him—"I know nothing more than this man did half a thousand years ago. And probably he knew no more than some one a thousand years before his time—or ten thousand. We do not even know, most of us moderns, what our ancestors knew. We think we have gained, always; we forget that we have lost also."

He was silent for a space, and his next words changed the current of thought.

"A little while ago—just before you felt the necessity of thanking me for my intervention last night—you said, 'I wish.' What was your wish? Or no——"

He held up a restraining hand as Travers opened his lips to speak.

"I will tell you what it was—not because I wish to be mysterious—you, of course, will perceive that the deduction of your thought was a simple matter—but because I think that you would prefer not to answer. You were about to wish that I could read to you some of the pages of the Book which you can not read."

Travers nodded slow agreement.

"Yes, that was my first thought; born out of anger at those who had desired my life and who took the life of the boy."

The Master of the *Djinnoon* touched his arm lightly.

"Be sure," he said, "that those who take a life must pay for it. That is an equation between Allah and man which Allah adjusts in His own good time. As for yourself, I dare not read you the future. You will understand why. If I told you that your life was safe you would grow careless perhaps—and I might be wrong. And if I told you that your days of life were few, you would not be yourself henceforth."

"That is a knowledge which I do not desire," said Travers, and his voice was sincere. "Such knowledge, or belief even, would be fatal to any man. Therefore if you know," he smiled, "keep the knowledge in your own heart."

"The words of a brave man," said the black. "And in return for that I shall tell you something."

Habib raised the ancient volume of magic and spread it upon his knees, and Travers noted that the big, parchment-like pages were covered with hand-drawn arabesques and weird designs, some of which were identifiable as sun and moon and stars, men and animals. Others were meaningless to him.

"We will not pry too deeply into the future," said Habib; "but let us see, if you wish, what old Abd-ul-Kereem has to say about you. Sometimes he gives results which are most startling, considering that he wrote and divined four centuries ago. You do not object?"

Travers shook his head in negation.

"Assuredly not," he answered. "Not, of course, that I can believe anything which anybody wrote about me four hundred years before I was born."

"Very well then. Will you tell me the date of your birth?"

Travers told him. Habib consulted a table pasted in the front of the book, which Travers rightly judged to be a table for the conversion of the Mohammedan to the Christian calander, and vice versa.

"That would have been the tenth day of the month of Ramadan, in the year——" He paused to consult another part of the table. "I have it now," he said, and sought a page in the book.

His big, black forefinger followed the weird designs, his lips muttered Arabic phrases, disconnected and unintelligible to Travers, and at last he said:

"It is somewhat amazing, I think—for this is what Abd-ul-Kereem, writing four hundred years ago, says concerning the present time in your life:

> "Guard against these: one from the east, two from the west, one from the south; a friend, two great birds together, and a group of men traveling. Aid will come from one hidden and two hidden and an unknown. A thing greater than that sought will be found."

He looked at Travers, smiling benignly, to find the American staring at the book, his face depicting a sharp wonder.

Now Travers had listened at first to the reading of the prophecy with unrepressed, although unevidenced, amusement. It was not the first time that he had heard oracular utterances which might mean anything; which depended upon coincidence or imagination for fulfilment, unless indeed they were inspired, not by any occult force, but by a perfectly human mind.

"One from the east, two from the west and one from the south" he had passed with a mental shrug, reflecting that the addition of a fourth direction would have made a one hundred per cent. probability. Neither had "a friend" nor "a group of men traveling" seemed to have any great significance.

Then suddenly the cabalistic characters inscribed by a man dead for four centuries brought him mentally to his feet, gasping. "Two great birds together!" His mind jumped to the metal button in his vest pocket. The clue, as he believed, to the one who had attempted his life by means of poisoned cigarets; the button with the double eagle of Germany stamped in its metal!

He heard the rest of the prophecy faintly; but as the Magician paused and turned to him, the thought intruded that not Sidi Abd-ul-Kereem the ancient, but Habib, the Black Magician, had evolved this prophecy, that Habib himself had taken this opportunity to warn him in the guise of the long-dead master of magic. His mind rebelled at the specific indication of the two great birds together. The rest he might have accepted dispassionately as ambiguous, oracular prophecy; this he could not accept as such; it pointed too definitely to the mind of Habib behind it all.

Actuated by this thought, and in silence, he drew the metal button from his waistcoat pocket and extended it to the Magician. The black man's eyes examined it, and though Travers scrutinized his face most carefully, there was not a flicker of a muscle to indicate that behind the face was any knowledge such as he suspected.

Habib, having finished the inspection of the button, looked at the American.

"I understand," he said. " 'Two great birds together.' The double eagle of Germany. Well—do you believe that Sidi Abd-ul-Kereem was wrong? Assuredly I should not trust Germany—nor any other nation for that matter—in the matter of the concession."

Travers bit his lip in chagrin as he returned the button to his pocket. The Magician had scored. Whether or not he had intended the part of the prophecy to refer to the attempt upon the life of the American, he had built up by a sentence a wall through which Travers could not penetrate. Travers realized acutely that any further question along that line would be met by blank ignorance on the part of Habib—ignorance either real or assumed.

"I admit the wisdom of the prophecy," he said.

He would not permit himself to feel that the Black Magician could not be counted upon as a friend. True, he had saved Travers' life, but perhaps for purposes of his own, which might be equally fatal to his plan. Travers' suspicions, therefore, were not to be divulged, at the present moment at least.

"I must go now," said the American as he rose. The Black Magician rose also. "But there is one thing I should like to say to you before I go. It is this:

"I believe that it is a fatal mistake for Morocco to grant this concession. I believe that the young Sultan has been forced into it by European intriguers. It is the beginning of the downfall of the empire. Once Europe has tasted blood there will be no satisfying it. The concession, if it is granted, must go to either France, Germany or myself. I desire to gain it—although I have little hope—to prevent either France or Germany from getting it. My employer desired it for business reasons, and I shall do my best. But beyond that, above that, I desire to prevent Europe from getting Morocco by the throat.

"I am a friend of Morocco, as you should know. If I secure this concession, there will at least be the knowledge that it will not be made a political matter. It will not, however, prevent France and Germany from demanding other concessions; will not prevent the European intriguers at the Sultan's court to plot for other concessions, to ruin the empire. But I should much rather—" his voice fell and was slow with sincerity—"I should much rather, Sid Habib, that no concession were to be granted, even though I were sure of securing it myself. I say that, not as an American business man, but in spite of my duty to the man whom I represent. I say it because I am a well-wisher of this country."

Habib met his direct gaze searchingly, his own face expressionless as a mask, until he saw that Travers had finished speaking. Then he bowed.

"What is written must be," he said.

Travers was somewhat embarrassed at having so freely expressed his opinions. He turned toward the door, and Habib, picking up a candlestick, lighted his way.

"I just thought," the American added boyishly, "I would like to have you know what I felt about it. I don't know why. Good night."

"I am honored by your confidence," returned the magician politely. "*Selaama.*"

At the doorway of the hotel Travers was accosted by a grinning Bigote.

"Well again?" asked Travers.

"Well? What you mean, well? Me no been sick. Me been jail."

"Jail? What for?"

"Don't know. Khalifa he send soldier to take me to jail this morning. Tonight let me out. No say nothing 'bout why. Ask soldier. Soldier say go to ——."

Travers stared at him.

"But you sent Larbi with the horse."

"Larbi? Larbi who? I no send nobody—neither no horse. Been jail."

Travers was silent for a space.

"All right," he said, finally. "Come around in the morning."

He went into the hotel, thinking of Larbi.

VIII

FOR the two following days affairs for Travers were quiet—too quiet to portend safety, he felt. This was a condition which kept him as much upon his guard as if he had known of plots being prepared against him. Although there was no evidence that the net was still being spread for his feet, he was satisfied that his enemies—whoever they were, and he would have given much to know—had not given up. In fact, he judged that the two unsuccessful attempts upon his life would perhaps render them more cautious in their movements, more deliberate and thorough, and hence more dangerous.

He transacted his business affairs with a feeling that his movements were being most carefully, but unostentatiously, watched. He noted that a certain young Moor, whom he had seen a number of times in the shop of the slipper and *djellaba* merchant, was frequently to be seen in his own vicinity. There were others whom he saw quite frequently also, but that did not argue that they were following him. Moreover, he sufficiently realized that he could not prevent espionage even if he desired.

His business affairs were not numerous. He spent some time again with the American Consul, a short, elderly man whom he heartily disliked.

"He is more interested in the placing of a comma in an official report than he is in the interests of American trade," is the way Travers classified him.

The Consul was of the type, rapidly disappearing, who had gained his appointment through high family connections and political pull, and whose chief aim in life was to permit himself to be annoyed as little as possible by the demands of his office. This did not mean that the work of the office was not always well done; the Consul inherited the ability to extract the maximum amount of labor from his subordinates to his own glorification. Travers left the Consulate in a high state of irritation, expressing opinions which were more truthful than polite.

From this interview he had proceeded to one even less satisfactory—a meeting with the native committee which had in charge the business of receiving the bids for the concession. Much of the opinion which Travers had heard in Tangier concerning this committee was verified. He did not meet the committee of three as a whole, but was required to talk with them individually—an arrangement which was very speedily explained. He found, as he had heard, that the chairman of the committee seemed to be a man of character, honest, straightforward, but hampered, if not worse, by the dishonesty and intrigues of his two colleagues. In some undefinable manner he gave Travers to understand the situation, to indicate that it would be practically useless to look for a square deal from the committee.

His conferences with the other two members emphasized the truth of this intimation; one he had found frankly pro-German—the fellow almost admitted verbally, and did admit tacitly, that he had been fixed by the German agent. The third member, no less brazen, took a pretended stand of being utterly independent in his decisions—and then proceeded to intimate, clearly enough for even a slow-witted person to understand, that he was for sale to the highest bidder, but not until considerable bidding had been done. Travers knew beyond a question that the fellow would play French agent against German agent, with much profit to himself, and he suspected what others also had suspected, that Germany would be able and willing to outbid France.

Travers knew the difference between the French and the German political psychology. France would pay up to a certain point, beyond which she would adopt other methods, being a miser nation; Germany would phlegmatically, stolidly, pay whatever was necessary, once she started to obtain a thing in this manner.

And so Travers, James J., anathematizing individually and collectively the American Consul, the members of the Concessions Committee, the French and German representatives and the methods of them all, returned to his hotel in no particularly angelic spirit. Even another visit from his English friend, Jamieson, failed to cheer him much, at least until between them they had disposed of the major portion of a bottle of "White Horse" such as, according to the label, "is supplied to the Members of Parliament."

He dined alone and spent the evening in the parlor of the hotel, listening to the ravings of a young and pretty art student who was suffering from a brainstorm induced by the "mystic, savage beauty" of the half-negro guide who had been her escort about the city in the afternoon. Travers stood it until disaster threatened, and then he went to bed, to dream that a very beautiful American girl was trying to get a mining concession from a half black Tangier guide, but that Herr Feldmann insisted upon giving her bread and milk instead.

Feeling more cheerful the next morning, Travers decided during his leisurely breakfast at the open window that so long as nobody seemed to be bothering him, he would take the initiative and become a nuisance to some one else. In other words, he would hunt up the German at the Café Aleman, where he was pretty sure to find him, and would see what he could make of the button with the double eagle. With this purpose in mind, he rode to the café, ordered a drink, which he replaced with one from a private flask that he now carried, and waited for Feldmann. An hour passed, however, without the arrival of the German, and then inquiry at the bar elicited the information that it was understood he had departed early that morning for a day's trip to Cape Spartel.

Defeated in his purpose, Travers started back to the hotel. In the jam at the Three Gates a hand was laid upon his ankle, and he looked down at a brown face grinning up at him from beneath the protecting hood of a dark *djellaba*.

"Ha! Achmido!" he exclaimed, reining his horse to a standstill and proffering his hand. "*Salàmalakum, ’l’abas alaik*. There is no wrong with you?"

"*’L’abas, sidi. ’L’abas*. All is well," replied the native. "Welcome back to Tangier. When will you come to Aïn Barid?"

A laden donkey scraped the side of Travers' horse.

"Come with me to the hotel," he said, "and let us talk."

"*M’zien, sidi. Zid!*"

He slapped the horse upon the flank and followed at Travers' stirrup through the gates to the hotel. There upon the terrace the Moor squatted beside Travers' chair, and they talked of old days.

ACHMIDO was the headman of a little village near Tetuan, where Travers, when in the country before, had visited frequently. He had been of some service to Achmido in a sudden illness which had smitten the man's entire family, and Achmido had become such a friend as few white men would understand. Too slow-witted and ignorant of affairs to anticipate Travers' desire in many things, the American had only to indicate what he wanted and Achmido, backed by all of the men, women and children of the village, would move mountains to attain it.

Travers was skeptical in the highest degree of the friendship between civilized white men. Particularly civilized white men in a civilized environment. One had to go, he thought, to the partially civilized or uncivilized races to find that real friendship of which poets sing and romantic historians write—the friendship which compels a man to sacrifice his own life for that of another. Between white men in uncivilized lands this is to be found; rarely, but more frequently than in civilized lands. But between white men and natives, where the refinement of progress has not worn away the fundamentals of manhood, of emotion and passion, supplanting them by cold mental processes, the sacrifice of self for another is more often to be found.

Travers knew that should he say to this brown-skinned, genial but slow-witted Berber squatting at his feet, "Achmido, one of us must die today; shall it be you or myself?" Achmido would not even pause to think; his answer would spring instinctively and swiftly from his undiluted savage emotions: "It is for the *sidi* to tell me," he would say, "where and when I shall die."

"You want me to come to Aïn Barid?" asked Travers.

Achmido—he was an older man than Travers—smiled, and the flash of his eyes was boyish.

"It has been long since my house was so honored, *sidi*. We—we have missed thee."

"And I thee," said Travers, feeling embarrassed by the mild lie, conscious of a swift regret that civilized life moved too swiftly to permit of much thought of absent friends. Conscious, too, of regret that the civilized heart has lost the capacity for continuous regretting, that emotions have become shallow, temporary.

"But all has been well with thee and thine?" he asked.

"*Aiwa, sidi. Allahumma lak el hamd!* O Allah, to Thee be praise!" the Moor replied, bobbing his head rapidly. "By His grace all has been well. Some years we have not had too much to eat. But all of my family still live, *wahamdulillah!*—and there are now three others, so that there are eight in all. Three boys are the newcomers!" he exclaimed, and laid upon Travers' knee a hand which invited congratulation. "Three boys! Strong, fat—and very beautiful!"

"The smiles of Allah are upon thee," answered Travers heartily. "Three more sons to bring honor upon thee. Indeed that is well. I am glad."

"*Barakalofic, sidi, barakalofic*," Achmido expressed his thanks. "I bethought me thou wouldst be pleased, even as I am. Also, I have enlarged my house. That I did the year after thy departure. And, *sidi*——"

His voice ceased, and he turned his brown eyes away from Travers for a space. Then, impulsively:

"Thou must not think it forward of me that I did build in my new house one room for thee alone, so that when thou came to see thy friend thou mightst have fitting accommodation. It is only a poor house, and thy room no better than the others, except that it is walled with friendship and roofed with affection."

Travers swallowed a little lump that had risen in his throat, and he laid a white hand upon that brown one that still rested upon his knee. He thought quickly. There was nothing to keep him in Tangier; there would be pig-shooting near Achmido's village; he would be beyond the machinations of his enemies for a few days; and he would bring pleasure to his friend.

"Let us go then, Achmido," he said, and was more than rewarded by the happiness which showed in the brown face. "I have nothing to keep me here. We may go this afternoon—or this evening—it is not a long distance."

"This evening, *sidi*, if it pleases thee. An hour before sunset if thou wilt. There are some matters I must attend to in Tangier, and I have even now arrived. But all will be in readiness an hour before *al moghreb*. Thou hast a horse? Good. I have pack animals and can get others for such goods as thou mayst wish to take. Thou wilt need one pack animal only? *M'zien*. It is arranged, *sidi*."

Achmido rose to his feet, a surprizing motion which raised him from his cross-legged position to an upright one with seemingly no effort.

"With your permission, then, *sidi*, I shall go about my business, to complete it as soon as may be. After which I will return here to serve thee. There will be time for me to do all that is necessary in the way of packing thy goods, so save thine own strength."

Achmido, smiling happily, took his departure for the *Soko-Chico*, to make purchases among the shops and to mention proudly and with no thought of caution to his acquaintances in the market place that the American *sidi* was to honor his house and village with a visit, as a result of which the news reached, within an hour, the ears of a number of persons who did not look upon it as a matter of inconsequence.

Travers went to his quarters to select such equipment as he wished to take with him to the little village of Aïn Barid. He penciled a hasty note to the American Consul, saying that he was going away for a few days, and dispatched it by Bigote, whom he found waiting at the hotel entrance.

Four o'clock found him in saddle, leading the way through the brown country back of Tangier, toward the road which leads to Tetuan. Followed him Achmido, riding a pack mule and leading another. The sandy hills seemed to fry yet from the afternoon sun, which still retained much of its force. Achmido was protected from its rays by his brown *djellaba*, with the big hood shading his face. Travers wore a thin white *sulham* and a pith helmet. They rode in silence, save for an occasional urge to their mounts and now and then some cheerful call from Achmido, replied to by the American. Both were happy—Achmido at returning home accompanied by honor and friendship; Travers at the feeling that for a little while Tangier with its menaces would be out of his life. In Aïn Barid he would be as far from it as if he were in Chicago.

They approached a little wayside shrine with yellow plastered walls, guarded by a solitary gnarled olive tree. They reached it. Then from the far side, where they had been hidden from view, half a dozen riders charged them. Taken off guard, with little more than three heart beats of time to prepare, resistance proved both futile and short. Travers and Achmido were thrown from their mounts, crushed down by blows which rendered them unconscious.

IX

THE Black Magician, returning to his house after an afternoon spent with a friend, found a message awaiting him. It was delivered by the aged black who took care of his house and acted as general servant to him, and who said it had been left orally by Selem. Habib listened to the message, frowned, nodded and dismissed his servant.

He had heard at noon, on his way to the mosque, that the American was departing an hour before *al moghreb* prayer with Achmido, for the latter's village. It lacked half an hour of that time now. In connection with this, the message which he had now received caused him nervously to pace back and forth across his room, his usually placid forehead wrinkled in thought and in displeasure. Suddenly he stopped and called loudly for his servant and, when the old man appeared, commanded:

"Go thou at once to the house of Selem, him who brought the message, and order him to come to me at once. Hasten."

The old man started off, shuffling stiffly but speedily down the street. Habib resumed his restless pacing; but in a few moments he heard the sound of voices, and Selem, removing his slippers at the doorway, entered. To him without preliminaries the Black Magician spoke quickly. There was authority in every word—authority and conciseness which made repetition and explanation unnecessary.

"The American and Achmido departed almost an hour ago for Anghera. You will take horse at once and follow them. Ride to the village of Es-Serif, where you will find them in the hands of a band of natives. To the chief of the band you must give this message."

He handed Selem a folded quill of paper which, while speaking, he had taken from some pocket inside his robe. Selem took the paper and tucked it carefully into the folds of his turban.

"That is all. Now go, and go speedily."

Selem acknowledged the words with a bow, and departed, his pockmarked face ornamented by a white scar across the chin, impassive. Within three minutes his horse was clattering through the Place of the Three Gates and across the cobbled *Soco Grande;* in five it struck the earth roads beyond the *soco* and broke into an easy, swift gallop which slackened not at all until the rider drew rein in front of the yellow saint's shrine, his attention attracted by certain objects which lay by the roadside. One of these was a peaked, red fez; the other an automatic pistol, the glitter of which had caught his eye. He dismounted and picked them up, dropping them into his *shakarah.* Also he surveyed the ground about, noting the picture presented by the tracks of men and animals. He could read it plainly.

"This," he observed to himself, "is where they were captured. There is no blood—" He looked on every side, then added, "And no bodies." He swung into the saddle, touched his horse with spur and renewed the gallop along the road toward Tetuan. Half an hour later he left the road and pursued a beaten trail which led southward. Shortly this trail brought him in sight of the village which was his destination.

In this village now two men looked death in the face—the American with the sensitive bravery of his race; Achmido, the Berber, with a stolidity caused by lack of imagination and by a very great faith in the wisdom of Allah. Upon regaining consciousness they had found themselves fettered and bound to their mounts, lashed across the saddles like bags of grain and speeding swiftly along the road. Eventually they had reached the village, where they had been unceremoniously taken from the saddles and thrown upon the ground, while a council of war was held by their captors.

The plans concerning them—and no attempt was made to keep them from overhearing—were not cheering. An argument between a low-browed, ugly black who seemed to be the leader of the abductors and one of his followers put Travers in possession of the essential facts.

"But I will have nothing to do," objected the man, "with the killing of them. I was not paid for that. To capture the American and hold him was well and good, although now we have two to guard instead of one, which is a bother. We are taking chances enough as it is, for what we have received. But to kill these men—No, I value my own life."

"Bah!" grunted the evil-faced leader, Wahda. "*Ya kalb ibn kalb!* Dog and son of a dog! What danger will there be? After we have shot them we will throw them into the charcoal ovens. No one knows we have taken them—except the village, and no one here is fool enough to admit the fact—and no one will ever be able to trace them."

But the other man still shook his head.

"I have observed," he said, "that most secret matters surprizingly become known. I was paid to assist in a certain matter. I have done my work, and I have my pay. And that is all I shall do, Unless, of course," he added, "they remain alive; in which case I shall also help to guard them."

"*La barak allahu fi-kum!*"

The black man cursed and thrust a fist into the heavy leather bag which swung over his shoulder, a bag which clinked with silver. Drawing out a handful of coins, he held it out to the objector.

"Here," he said, "is more money, fool. We were paid twice for this matter. A fact which I should have told you in due course.

Once by—" he checked himself—"once by him who desired the American to be kept out of the way for seven days—and later by one who wished him kept out of the way forever."

Reluctantly the man who had objected to the killing, took the coins from the black hand, but he still shook his head.

"I do not like it," he insisted. "I do not like it. Nevertheless——"

But Wahda gave him no further opportunity for discussion. Taking more coins from his bag, he distributed them among the others.

"Now," he ordered, "bring the American and that other one and let us finish this business. Prop them up against the cactus." He laughed brutally. "The thorns may stick them, but they will not notice them long. *Y'allah!*"

Travers and Achmido were lifted and carried to the cactus hedge. Achmido cursed his captors as the thorns bit through his *djellaba* into his back. But the abductor who had objected to the killing was one who aided in moving the American, and Travers in some way escaped the thorns.

"Your rifles, now. Here," ordered the black, cocking his own gun. "Three of us to each man, all equally responsible."

Travers watched the operations through narrowed eyes, then turned and looked at his friend Achmido.

"I am sorry, Achmido, that I got you into this," he said. "I guess it's all over except the shooting—but I'm going to take a last chance."

"It is my fault, friend of my heart," replied Achmido, "in that I invited you to come with me. Wherefore if you are to die, I desire to die also."

Then Travers lifted his voice and addressed the black.

"For our release," he offered, "I will double the sum that you got for our capture and for our death."

Instantly five arms holding rifles slacked and fell, while five pairs of eyes sought those of the leader. But he merely grinned viciously.

"Do you think I am a fool?" he replied. "Even though you paid double, or ten times the amount, can I release you now—to return for our heads?" He swung upon his followers. "And do you want to see each other's heads stuck on bayonets and paraded through the *Sôk-el-Kebir* in Tangier?" he shouted.

The picture seemingly did not appeal to them. Their slower wits had not foreseen it.

"But we can go away," suggested one. "Far away."

"Clear to *al hotama*," growled the leader.

"I will guarantee you immunity," offered Travers. "The entire matter shall be forgotten."

"Enough!" shouted Wahda. "Once before a Christian made promises and betrayed me. My back still bears the marks of the lashes. Ready," he ordered his men. The rifles raised.

At that moment a rider dashed around the corner of the village wall and brought his horse to a sliding standstill within a foot of the executioners. The rifles fell as they turned upon him. From his turban he took a folded quill of paper and with neither greeting nor other word handed it to the black.

Resting his rifle against his middle Wahda unfolded the paper and read the single line upon it, scowling viciously. Then as he studied the signature his expression changed; a fear took the place of anger. His eyes opened more widely and his chin dropped. He glanced at the messenger and then back at the weird Arabic signature.

"It is—it is truly—*his* order!" he stammered.

Selem answered with a sneer in his voice.

"Is not his signature known from Cape Spartel to Tunis? I think there is no doubt in your mind. If there is—dare to disobey the order."

He shrugged and turned his horse.

"No! No! I will do as is written," hastily assured the black.

Again his eyes sought the signature and his body bent a little in token of reverence.

"The Hand of Allah!" he breathed. "*Allah kerim!* And I had nearly fired!" He turned to Selem. "What then am I to do with the American?"

"That is no concern of mine."

Selem struck spurs to his horse and galloped away.

The black turned to his followers.

"These men are not to be killed," he said. "Take them to the village and guard them—as was at first arranged."

X

HADJ HAMED squatted in the safe harbor of his little shop, his bamboo pen tracing the words of another letter, a letter whose similarity of form and content to that which he had written a few days before might properly have caused one to judge that it was being inscribed to the same person.

> The American [he now wrote after having disposed of other matters in the first part of the letter] departed at *al moghreb* of yesterday, with Sid Achmido ibn Drees for the village of the latter, where, it is reported, he was to spend some days as his guest. Whether he arrived there is not so certain; the desires of Allah not infrequently run contrary to the plans of man. I do not think he ran away from Tangier because he was afraid, although a German and a Frenchman here seem to believe that such was the case. Discretion, of course——

The shop was darkened through the cutting off of the light by a big, black figure in the doorway, and Hadj Hamed looked up from his writing.

"I desire to purchase a pair of slippers," a deep voice said.

"Assuredly," replied Hadj Hamed, his eyes taking in the massive, black-swathed figure of Habid, Master of the *Djinnoon.* He swung the low table to one side and took several pairs of yellow, heelless *bilghai* from the shelf beside him. "Enter. Enter, *sidi*, and see which ones best fit your feet."

But though his lips formed words of commerce, his keen brain was asking whether the big, mysterious black man desired slippers—or something else.

Habib stepped up and crossed the sill into the shop, shook off his slippers and thrust a black-stockinged foot into one of a half a dozen slippers which Hadj Hamed had placed in a little row.

" 'Take care of your feet,' " he quoted, " 'and they will lead you to the heights.' It is true that the slippers I wear are yet good for some service, but in some ways I am a child. New slippers please me."

It was not an excuse—only, on the face of it, a friendly little confidence—but again Hadj Hamed wondered.

"Too big," said the black, raising his foot and flopping the slipper loosely. "Big enough for Mulai Ali es-Shareef, who of all the saints is said to have the largest feet.

He laughed, and Hadj Hamed joined in his mirth discreetly, as became a tradesman toward a patron.

The calculating eye of the black man was upon the other slippers. He chose the smallest—but his foot refused to enter.

"Too small by far," he said. "The remaining slipper will therefore be the right size. This—" he paused a moment and tossed the slipper from his foot—"this requires a foot much smaller than mine. It might fit a woman—or him who I have heard boasts of the smallness of his feet."

There was a hesitation while one's heart might beat once.

"Mohamed Ali," he concluded.

Hadj Hamed flashed a quick look at him and found the black's eyes absorbed in watching the business of a black foot finding its right-sized domicile in the third slipper, while the face bore a smile of amusement.

"Mohamed Ali," observed Hadj Hamed quietly, smoothly, "wears a slipper smaller still than that."

Again he looked swiftly upward, wondering whether the import of his words might have been understood by the Black Magician. But if they were he saw no evidence of the fact upon the black face. Or was there just the ghost of a smile in the tensing of the upper lip?

Nodding, Habib took money from his *shakarah* and handed it to Hadj Hamed. Then he picked up the new slippers, placed them in the big leather bag from which he had taken the money and slipped his feet into the older footwear.

"The American," he commented in a casual voice, "visits in Aïn Barid, I understand."

"So it is said in the market place, on the authority of Achmido ibn Drees," agreed Hadj Hamed.

"The Frenchman and the German will have only to be concerned with themselves for the present then," said Habid. "Unless they follow," he added. "They seem to have little love for him. I myself think he is unwise to travel. He would have considerable value in the hands of the right person. For example ——"

He paused and watched a camel lumbering past the doorway, laden with grain.

"For example—" repeated Hadj Hamed gently in a tone of inquiry.

"Oh—Mohamed Ali, for one," answered the Master of the *Djinnoon*, and flashed a look, swift as lightning stroke, into the eyes of Hadj Hamed.

Before the merchant recovered from the surprize of both name and look the black man was gone.

"Humph!" grunted Hadj Hamed. "I wonder— I wonder—"

He leaned over and picked up the big slippers and the little slippers and raised them to the shelf. As he tipped them up a little square of folded paper fell out. Absent-mindedly he unfolded it and saw that it was written upon. He read the two-line message, and another grunt of surprize escaped him.

"*Allah kerim!*" he exclaimed. "*Now* I know why he wanted slippers."

He drew the table to him again and resumed his letter-writing—swiftly, as if he had found a new and important subject to write about, as indeed he had. He finished the letter, sprinkled sand upon it from an engraved silver shaker to dry it, folded it carefully and placed it in his *shakarah*. As he did so he started at the shrill cry of a tattered beggar who stood outlined at his doorway with shiny black begging bowl extended in one hand, iron-tipped staff in the other, a filthy bandage half-covering his face, leaving but one eye visible.

"*All'arbi! All'arbi!* Alms in the name of Allah the Compassionate!" cried the beggar. "*All'arbi! All'arbi!*"

Hadj Hamed thrust the table away from him and stared. The one-eyed beggar turned slowly until he faced the shop; his single eye was fixed sternly upon the face of Hadj Hamed; the begging bowl was thrust into the door of the shop.

"*All'arbi! All'arbi!*" wailed the mendicant.

"Enter," cried Hadj Hamed hastily. "Enter. Here is alms for you."

The words could be heard in the street, but those which followed could not.

"*Allah kerim!*" he exclaimed. "The man sets no value whatsoever upon his head!"

And more loudly again—

"Enter."

The beggar stepped into the shop, revealing length of bare and disgracefully dirty legs as he did so, and sat down heavily in the doorway. The coins of Hadj Hamed tinkled as they fell into the bowl.

"Back farther in the shop," commanded Hadj Hamed as he dropped the coins. "Back farther."

The one brown eye of the beggar seemed to twinkle maliciously.

"*All'arbi! All'arbi!*" he cried, thrusting the bowl into the street toward a passer-by. "*All'arbi! All'arbi!*"

His cracked voice shrilled within the little shop. Then he rose awkwardly, as if his joints were stiff with rheumatism, and took four or five steps back into the rear of the shop, where again he squatted facing the merchant.

He was a big man, in spite of his bent back and hunched shoulders. Of his features little was to be seen. The bandage about one eye covered half the face beneath the voluminous hood of his tattered *djallaba;* his cracked voice began "*All'arbi* ——"

But the swift hand of Hadj Hamed fell upon his shoulder.

"For the love of Allah, cease!" he whispered. "Why do you come here to Tangier, of all places?" he asked impatiently.

The mendicant's lips stretched in a joyous grin. The curve magically left his spinal column, his head lifted, and his shoulders resumed their normal position.

"Who hunts a wolf in a sheepfold?" he asked, chuckling. "Today I have received alms from the great—from the basha of the city, the minister of war, even Sid Mohamed Torres, the *naïb* of our master the Sultan. Their coins are even now in my *shakarah*. Thou knowest that it is good to give alms to the poor."

"*Allah akbar!*" growled Hadj Hamed in reply. "And each one of the three would more gladly have given a thousand pounds for thy head than a single *real* in the name of Allah the Compassionate. Why—" the impatience faded from his voice and was replaced by sincere concern—"why will you take such chances? Even now, as you sit here, soldiers may come."

"What? Is not the shop of Sidi Hadj Hamed above suspicion? I have heard no word of evil concerning it."

"No place is above suspicion in these days," retorted the merchant, and returned to his previous thought. "Any one of those men whose alms you solicited might have penetrated behind your outward appearance—might have seen beneath it——"

"Only Aïsa the One-Eyed," interrupted the beggar.

Hadj Hamed straightened, and his two eyes bored into the single eye of the mendicant.

"By Allah!" he growled. "I had not thought of that. Even I——"

He reached up and lifted the bandage on the beggar's face; two eyes instead of one now laughed at him. The big beggar quivered with silent mirth as he readjusted the bandage, knotting it tightly so that it would not be misplaced by accident.

"Ho, ho!" he chuckled. "Even Hadj Hamed can not tell which is Aïsa the One-Eyed and which is ——"

Hadj Hamed silenced the name with a quick gesture of warning.

"—not," added the beggar, and went off into another spell of silent laughter.

Hadj Hamed looked at his watch.

"It is a fitting hour for tea," he said. "I will order some. Then there are matters to be spoken of, now that you are here—although I wish you were not. I had written a letter to you."

"Tea, by all means," agreed the beggar.

Hadj Hamed rose and went to the doorway, looking up and down the street. He saw one of the boys who, during the late afternoon, pass back and forth along the main street, vending tall glasses of hot, very sweet tea, garnished with sprigs of green mint. He called to him, requesting two glasses. With them he returned to his place beside the beggar.

"At any rate," he observed, "those who see will merely think that I am over-charitable to an unfortunate. Or at least," he added, doubt in his voice, "I hope that is all they will think."

"Ere long it will be dark," observed the beggar, "and then we can go to your house, where perhaps you will be less perturbed of spirit on my account, and even more hospitable."

"And I hope that this same darkness will see you on your way back to the safety of the hills."

"I shall breakfast there," returned the beggar. "Even beggars may ride—occasionally. What is the news concerning which you have written to me?"

Hadj Hamed lowered his voice almost to a whisper and spoke swiftly, while the beggar listened with an expressionless face—except that now and then his lips fluttered in a smile—and sipped his tea. Hadj Hamed finished with a deep exhalation, and for a space there was silence. Then the beggar spoke.

"The Master of the *Djinnoon* has my warmest admiration. He has a most capable head."

A sudden crash of cannon shook the shop. Another crash followed quickly. A third and a fourth. Hadj Hamed counted them audibly until they ceased.

"The Sultan's salute," he said, then, looking at his guest. "The Master of the *Djinnoon* was not mistaken; the letter from his Majesty has come, even as he prophesied."

"Perhaps it was not prophesy, but knowledge," suggested the beggar. "Assuredly he knew what I also know, but which is yet hidden from Tangier, that his Majesty the Sultan will reach El K'sar Kebir tomorrow. And if he knew that, his further knowledge need not be credited to the omniscience of spirits. I suspect—But that is beside the point." He dismissed the thought with a shrug. "And if the American is a captive in El-Serif instead of a guest of Achmido ibn Drees in Aïn—then Allah smiles upon us."

XI

IN TANGIER CITY that evening there were many little eddies of confusion. The royal letter from the Sultan had been made public, after having been read in the mosque at the time of the *moghreb* prayer. His Majesty had arrived in El K'sar, where he would remain for an indefinite period; a new basha had been appointed, the tax rate had been increased, a new Vizier of the Treasury had been named —and the Sultan had dismissed the Concessions Committee from duty and would himself receive the bids in El K'sar and act upon them personally.

The change in bashas, the increase in the taxes, and the appointment of a new Vizier were matters of no moment to certain people; but the royal command with respect to the concession bids created interest, surprize or consternation among those immediately concerned—and gave thought to a number of persons apparently not so immediately concerned.

De Beaumont, dining *tête-à-tête* with one Madame Giraud in the Ville de France, expressed his annoyance in phrases which caused even the female agent of the French

Secret Service to raise her expressive eyebrows in protest.

"What is a fact is a fact, monsieur, my friend," she pointed out, "and one would do better to consider the new situation rather than waste time considering one which has passed. Even though you had matters nicely arranged with one member of the committee—" she shrugged her shapely white shoulders. "Well, my friend, I have never been quite able to see upon what foundations you built your house of hope that you would secure the concession. It is not my affair, of course; although naturally I would aid any one in any undertaking which would benefit our country. But if you had one member of the committee bought and paid for, no less assuredly did the German own another—and I understand that the chairman was not for sale."

"Not yet perhaps," agreed de Beaumont cynically, "but the way had been paved to secure his cooperation."

"But the German can pay as high a price as you; higher perhaps."

"It was not only a question of gold," explained de Beaumont. "I am not completely a fool—*espèce d'idiot.*"

A little laugh of amusement trickled from his dinner companion's lips.

"Assuredly no, *mon ami,*" she hastened to assure him. "You had then some other influence?"

"*Naturellement.* He has not always been quite discreet. He is an old man—and in any long life there are bound to be—" he hesitated a moment—"errors of conduct," he concluded.

"I perceive." Madame Giraud nodded her pretty head. "And you dug back through the years until you found them."

"Certainly," agreed de Beaumont. "It was inevitable. *Les affaires sont les affaires.*"

Madame Giraud looked at him reflectively, under dropped eyelids.

"Business is business, eh? But I wonder," she communed audibly with herself, "I wonder if your premise is always true. If, for example, one should dig back through the years which Monsieur de Beaumont has lived——"

At de Beaumont's frown she ceased her gibe and laughed again.

"But now—" de Beaumont jumped away from the digression—"now all that we have done is wasted. Time is short: I must go to El K'sar—and it takes time to successfully carry out plans. The only gleam of brightness is the fact that that cursed American is out of the way for a while."

Much the same line of thought did Herr Feldmann follow in his communings with himself, lacking a fair companion with whom to discuss the abrupt disruption of his schemes. But while the presence of Madame Giraud restrained the Frenchman somewhat from the expression of his real thoughts, Feldmann was under no such restraint. He cursed viciously and audibly in rolling German, and his face was not good to look upon. Who or what, he wondered, could have been responsible for this royal order—or royal interference!

The concession had been his, of that he was certain. One member of the committee was bound to him by unbreakable bonds; another he knew had been bought by de Beaumont. But this bothered him not at all; let the French exert themselves as they might, let them offer all the gold in their treasury, let them find what they could in the past of the chairman of the committee—and Feldmann was by no means in ignorance of the investigations which de Beaumont had made—the fact remained that he had held a card higher than any of his opponents could play. The chairman would suddenly find himself forced to vote in favor of the German bid.

And as for the American—the German sniffed scornfully; he knew how to handle those upstart Americans. At any rate the American was now out of the way; the German dismissed him with a shrug of his heavy shoulders and turned his attention to a consideration of the business of getting to El K'sar.

"The Frenchman," he observed, "will lose no time in getting started. Not tomorrow, I think, but the day after assuredly. It is useless to start at night. Yes. The day after tomorrow. I shall depart at daylight."

THE Black Magician had listened with a smile to the roll of the Sultan's salute from the customs-house battery. He had been present in the crowded mosque when the royal letter had been read, and he returned to his own house with his face expressive of no surprize, but of inner satisfaction.

It chanced that on his way from the

mosque through the shadowing streets he passed Hadj Hamed, and bowed in greeting. But he did not stop. Fifty paces behind Hadj Hamed he passed a tattered, one-eyed beggar, shuffling along with the aid of his staff. His observant glance took in the miserable figure, which held out a begging bowl and cried: "*All'arbi! All'arbi, sidi.*" The Master of the *Djinnoon* flung a coin into the bowl and started on. But with the third step he halted, swung about and called to the mendicant.

"*Ajni hinava*—come here," he commanded.

The mendicant turned at sound of the black man's voice and approached, his one brown eye staring somewhat blankly from a face that was screwed up in inquiry. The Master of the *Djinnoon* looked deep into that single eye, and his lip muscles quivered.

"Thy name?" he demanded.

"Aïsa the One-Eyed, I am called," quavered the beggar. "Aïsa the One-Eyed, who seeks alms in the name of Allah the Compassionate; *adama 'llahu bakakum*—may Allah perpetuate your existence."

The Black Magician's face broke into a grin.

"Aïsa the One-Eyed, eh?" he repeated. "The name is good enough. But I think——"

"Yes, *sidi;* you think—" suggested the beggar.

"I think another would suit thee better."

"And that name?" inquired the mendicant quaveringly.

"As for that I could not say. But perhaps you yourself——"

He strode off.

The beggar remained gazing after him for a space, his lips expanded in a broad grin, and then he resumed his way toward the house of Hadj Hamed.

BUT neither the echoes of the Sultan's salute nor the buzzing caused by his Majesty's commands, reached the ears of the American, captive in the little village of Es-Serif, among the Anghera Hills. He sat upon the earth floor in a small, poorly lighted room in a hut built of mud and stone, rough but strong, while his friend Achmido occupied another corner. Both were held in place by strong iron chains fastened around their ankles by padlocks and affixed to iron rings set into the wall. Their hands and arms were free; they could rise and walk about within the length of their chains, and they were therefore uncomfortable only of spirit, and not of body.

They had been well fed on *kesk'soo* and stewed vegetables and a broiled chicken, followed by sweets and coffee; and as Travers chanced to have a plentiful supply of cigarets they were comfortable enough physically. But this fact was scarcely appreciated, in view of their annoyance at their plight. Achmido raged at the indignity put upon them and vowed that he, with his men, would raid the village and exterminate it the very day upon which he managed to escape.

But Travers' mind was occupied not with thoughts of revenge, but with the consideration of his captivity. He knew the cause of it well enough, and he was satisfied to credit it to de Beaumont—particularly in view of the first intention of putting him to death—with the German as a second bet.

Still he could not entirely dismiss the thought that perhaps his conclusion was wrong. He recalled the warning of the Green Saint at the Place of the Three Gates, and reflected that such a man was in a better position to know of native plots than of plots hatched in the brains of Europeans. He thought of Larbi, the native boy who had disappeared before the poisoned cigarets had killed the boy at the hotel. He remembered his suspicions of the youth Mustapha, the boy's frequent presence in his immediate vicinity and his acquaintance with a certain slipper and *djellaba* merchant in the Siageen.

Thinking thus, he felt the impossibility of justly attributing his abduction and even the attempt upon his life, to his known enemies, de Beaumont and Herr Feldmann; there was obviously too much beneath the surface of things which he could not see. Nevertheless, although his intelligence told him he might be in error he could not dismiss a feeling that his present situation was the result of European plans, most probably those of de Beaumont.

So far as the concession went, unless he could escape he was out of the race. Only a few days remained, and the bid was in his pocket. He had decided to leave it at the American Consulate for safety, but after his irritating interview with the Consul, had given up the idea.

And the thought of the Consul in this

connection reminded him of the note he had sent informing him that he was going with Achmido; his absence, even though prolonged, would cause no question. Even though the death, to which he had been so near, should overtake him—and he by no means felt that such was improbable—he was satisfied that investigation would take place late, and that it would be superficial at best; that is, until "Emperor" Lee should discover that he had disappeared. After which, Travers pondered, there would be things to pay for a number of people.

But these reflections on post-mortem activities occupied little of his thoughts. His immediate desire was to escape. They had been treated kindly enough by the two men who had been assigned to guard and serve them; but although Travers had made to them generous suggestions concerning wealth which might accrue through a greater consideration, they had obviously been in too great fear to succumb to temptation.

He had examined his chain and found it perfect—too perfect to be broken. He had examined the padlock and decided that with a piece of wire he could manipulate it—but he might as well have reflected that a key would serve; there was no wire at hand. He searched his clothing carefully and searched through the dirt as far as he could reach in the hope of coming upon a bit of wire or a nail or something which would serve his purpose; but unprofitably.

Night fell again; the guards entered with food and water and candles and withdrew, barring the door after them. With the food was neither knife, fork nor spoon; Moroccans eat with their fingers. This was not difficult for Travers; he had become accustomed to it—but it meant that there was no fork available which might have been used upon the lock.

They ate their supper, smoked and chatted and grew sleepy. Travers removed his shoes and coat and then instinctively reached for his collar and tie, only to remember that they had been partially torn from him in the struggle at the time of his capture, and that upon being placed in the hut he had removed them entirely and thrown them into a corner. Suddenly he was stricken motionless; his hands remained raised to his neck, and he stared at the corner where the collar lay. He had remembered that in the tie was a scarf pin—the bit of stout wire which, if he could get it, would serve to open the locks which held them. Unfortunately the tie was out of reach of both himself and Achmido. He thought of calling for the guard and asking him to bring it to him, but immediately reflected that unless the guard were a fool he would know that he had no use for it at night, might suspect something, and thereby might be lost the only chance there was.

In a low voice he told Achmido about the pin with the thought that his native friend would sleep better through the knowledge. Then he picked up the piece of matting which had been given him to sit and sleep upon, shook it out with the thought that he was probably disturbing the slumbers of those fleas which were not in his own clothes, and started to lie down when another thought came to him.

Carefully he took from the end of the matting one of the long fibers of which it was woven and tested it for strength. It seemed strong. He freed others and tied them together, making a long cord. At one end he made a running noose—a miniature lariat. The brown eyes of Achmido watched him curiously.

His lasso finished, Travers stood up, swung it about his head and sent the noose toward the collar and tie. It fell short; he had not made sufficient allowance for the lightness of the cord. Again he cast, and the noose fell true. He pulled carefully, his face agrin, but just as he thought he had the collar captured, the noose slipped under it and came free.

But after several ineffectual casts the little riata settled properly around the collar and gripped it, and Travers pulled in his trophy. He drew out the scarf pin and held it up triumphantly to Achmido. Admiration shone in the native's eyes.

"*Ajuba! Ajuba!*—Wonderful! Wonderful!" he murmured, gazing at the lariat.

Travers coiled his little rope carefully and stowed it away in a trousers pocket, thinking that it might again be useful. Now he looked at the high, foot-square window and at the heavy door, which he knew was barred on the outside and watched by guards.

"Not tonight," he said to Achmido. "It will be useless. Only I shall make sure that it will work."

He poked around in the padlock with the pin; bent the instrument a little and tried it further. It was an inexpensive lock, and shortly he was rewarded by seeing it snap open. For a while he studied to see if he could so arrange the padlock that it would appear to be closed and yet in reality would be unlocked, but he could not solve the problem. On reflection he did not dare to take the chance of leaving it unlocked, run the risk of a guard detecting it and searching him for his precious pin. Regretfully with a mental effort he snapped it closed again, secreted the pin in his shirt and lay down to sleep.

XII

"IT WILL be best to wait until after the noon meal; in the heat of the day most of the village will be asleep, and all will be sleepy."

Thus Achmido when, immediately after awakening in the morning, Travers discussed with him the question of their procedure in attempting to escape. He had pointed out, to the accompaniment of nods of agreement from his native friend, the obvious impossibility, even though they were free from their chains, of either getting through the window or through the door while it was barred—to say nothing of the guard whom they believed to be on constant duty.

True, the door was barred on the outside, and their combined efforts, especially considering the heavy shoulders and great bulk of Achmido, might result in tearing it from its hinges or forcing out the sockets which held the bar; but, as Travers pointed out, by the time they had accomplished that, the whole village would be aroused and escape assuredly made impossible. Standing upon Achmido's broad back, Travers could have reached the window, and by squirming sidewise could possibly have gotten through. Achmido called attention to this, insisting that this was the course for Travers to follow. But the American would not consider a plan which involved leaving his friend behind.

"It is not I that they are interested in," pointed out Achmido. "I do not think they would do anything to me if you should escape. They are holding me only because they do not want me to spread the alarm."

"Quite true," agreed Travers to part of this. "Nevertheless, they would know that you had aided me and no doubt would take revenge upon you."

"But what of that?" Achmido's tone was casual. "I am of no great importance—except to myself and to my family; whereas——"

But Travers stopped him with a gesture.

"Both or neither," he said, and Achmido perceived that he meant it.

"At midday then," Travers elaborated the suggestion of his friend, getting the point, "when the servant comes to remove the dishes after we have eaten. While we are eating I will unfasten the locks."

Achmido nodded briskly.

"And I will take care of the servant, so that he shall make no noise."

"Then," continued Travers, "we will rush the guard and trust to Allah that we find some way of escape."

His voice had become hesitant; put into words, the hope seemed futile. If only they could get out of their prison after dark he felt that it would be a comparatively simple matter. But before dark the door was barred for the night, and any subterfuge to have it opened would unquestionably arouse suspicion, besides which it would be opened then only by the guard, was was armed, and who would be ready for trouble.

So they made their plans and, having made them, entertained each other during the endless morning, Travers with stories of America and lands he had visited; Achmido capping his tales with narrations of incidents which he had observed during his twoscore years of life in a turbulent world.

The little square of yellow sunlight from the window crept across the floor and began to climb the wall, by which they knew that the morning had passed. The door was unbarred and flung open, and the servant entered with their food. Placing it before them, he withdrew; and the bar again fell into place.

Heretofore they had taken as much time as possible for disposing of their meals—it caused the slow hours to pass less slowly. But now they ate quickly, as hungry men eat, in order to get ready for the serious business before them. Finishing the meal, Travers produced his bent scarf pin, quickly released the padlock which held the chain upon his own ankle, and then did the same service for his friend. Then Achmido, removing his turban from his head, tore strips from it and laid them where they would be handy. They resumed their former positions, wrapping the chains around their ankles, and waited—waited through another day, it seemed to Travers.

But at last there came a voice outside, the door swung open and the servant entered and bent over to pick up the brass tray which bore their dishes. The strong right arm of Achmido reached out like the strike of a cobra and dragged the servant to him, burying the man's head in the folds of his *djellaba* to stifle any outcry.

So quick was the action, and so startled the poor wretch, that he offered little resistance, and his cry was too feeble to be heard. Achmido, with one hand upon the fellow's throat, stuffed a piece of the turban cloth into his mouth and fastened it in place with another, while Travers sprang to him and quickly tied hands and feet, expecting every moment to hear the shout of the guard which should alarm the village.

But the guard was squatting around the corner of the door smoking; and his first knowledge that anything out of the ordinary was taking place came when his rifle was snatched from across his knees. The knowledge ended there, and abruptly, for Travers brought the gun butt down upon his head, and he rolled over unconscious.

Achmido at his heels, Travers dashed toward an opening in the cactus wall of the village, cocking the rifle as he ran and praying fervently that it was loaded. Immediately he had a chance to satisfy himself upon this point. Ahead of him, from behind a house, came the evil-faced black, Wahda, who had so nearly been his executioner. He carried a rifle, and after one startled glance at the American raised the gun to his shoulder. But he did not live to pull the trigger. Travers fired from the hip, and the black dropped.

"Get his gun," shouted Travers over his shoulder to Achmido.

And while the latter stopped to do so, and to unbuckle a belt of cartridges from the dead man's waist, Travers stood guard. The shot had aroused the village, and men with rifles swarmed to the empty prison house. Then, catching sight of their prisoners, but taking due note of the rifle with which Travers had them covered, they started jabbering excitedly. But they made no move. Achmido straightened up.

"Let us go now," he said, and started off. Even as he spoke and Travers turned to follow him a shot sounded. Travers paused to turn and fire at the group, then cried to Achmido—

"Let us make for the cactus hedge; it will protect us somewhat."

Achmido ran a few steps; then his right leg gave way, and he fell. Travers saw that a bullet had struck him in the foot. He heard a shout behind him and turned to face the crowd, which had now gained courage and were rushing down upon them. Again he pulled the trigger of his rifle at the mass, which was little more than ten paces from him; but no report followed his action. The rifle was empty.

He heard a roar at his side and realized that Achmido was shooting. Clubbing his own gun, he swung at the first man to reach him and brought him down; but over the fallen form leaped the others, tore the gun from him and bore him to earth. Speedily they found themselves prisoners again, and now came cries of "Kill them! Kill them!" One of the guards drew a pistol and pointed it at Travers, but a hand struck it up—the hand of that guard who had objected to the execution of the American and Achmido.

"The Hand of Allah," he growled. "Are you fools, to disobey *his* orders?"

Crestfallen, the group fell back.

"Carry them to the house and secure them again," ordered this guard, who seemed to have assumed command since the death of Wahda, which death seemed to concern them very little, for they gave the body of the black scarcely a glance as they passed by it on their return.

The door closed, and the bar again fell into place.

"Why did you not run?" Achmido reproached Travers. "You could have escaped, for I could have held them a while."

But Travers only shrugged his shoulders in reply. Achmido, he knew, understood perfectly why he would not have been left alone with a bullet through his foot.

With some of their drinking water and a piece of Achmido's turban Travers dressed the wound as best he could and bandaged it. It was not a serious injury, but sufficient to make walking very painful for some time. Achmido bore the pain of Travers' ministrations without even a grimace; he was of a race who, when they find amputation of a limb necessary, cut it off with their own hands and thrust the bleeding stump into glowing coals to cauterize it. Nor did he complain at the failure of their plans.

"If it had been the will of Allah that we escape, then assuredly we would now be free," he stated his creed with the obvious corollary: "That we did not escape is proof that it was not the will of Allah that we should do so."

And Travers found in his own heart a sympathy with this conception of Fate's hand in his affairs.

THE square of sunlight faded from the wall, the window grew gray, and the odor from the cooking pots told them that nightfall was approaching and that supper was being prepared. The tranquillity of evening seemed to reach them even in their prison; and Achmido, a True Believer, knelt facing the east and made his *moghreb* prayer.

The tranquillity was shattered as a glass is shattered upon stone. Came a fusillade of shots, hoarse voices shouting widly, shrieks of women and children, and the closer sounds of running slippers and amazed voices. The shooting increased in volume, drew nearer, and there were sounds which indicated that a body of horsemen had entered the village and were riding down or killing the inhabitants. Travers and Achmido rose to their feet and gazed at each other in perplexity.

"It is a raid," said Achmido. "I have seen raids before. I know their voices. But—who can be raiding the village? It can not be my own men. They do not know I am here. Can it be——"

He looked at Travers in question, but Travers shook his head.

"Not my friends," he said.

The uproar grew in volume, then subsided as suddenly as it had arisen. The bar of the prison door was thrown back, the door swung open, and a big, hooded figure stood in the doorway, outlined against the yellow flame from a thatch-roofed hut. As he peered within, a man came with a queer tin lantern containing a lighted candle and stood beside him. The light from the lantern fell upon the forms of the American and Achmido.

"Hmph! I was told the truth," observed the man in the doorway.

Drawing a knife from his belt, he entered the room and swiftly unlocked their fetters. Travers could now see his face. It was bold and full and brown-bearded, but it was one that he had never seen before. He stood up, and Achmido also gained his feet, despite the pain. The big man started for the door. But Travers called after him.

"I thank you, *sidi*, although I do not know your name. Are we at liberty now?"

The big man paused in his stride, half turned; a great laugh, like the booming of distant cannon, came from his throat.

"I fear not," he said when the laughter had subsided. "It is not so written. You are my captives now instead of prisoners of Wahda, the black. But I shall treat you much more kindly."

The big laugh rolled again, seeming to shake the very walls of the hut, and he strode off. Travers gazed at the retreating back, then turned to Achmido.

"It seems that we have merely changed one master for another. However—I am much more inclined to like the new one than the old. Do you know who he is?"

A faint smile grew upon Achmido's face, a smile which seemed to smack of derision for their plight.

"That," he said, "is Sidi Achmed ben Mohamed willd-ben-Ali, to give him his full name. Better known, perhaps, as Mohamed Ali."

"The bandit? The outlaw?" exclaimed Travers.

"So men call him. Men who are not his friends," answered Achmido.

XIII

TRAVERS awakened the following morning and for a little space felt that he was coming out of a vividly realistic but improbable dream. Then upon his ears broke a deep, roaring laughter, which startled him fully awake and brought to his mental vision the picture of the big, brown-bearded man outlined in the doorway by the yellow flames of a burning hut.

"Mohamed Ali," he murmured, and the memory of the events of the night came tumbling upon him, head over heels—the swift ride from the raided village southward among the hills surrounded in a cavalcade of horsemen who acknowledged Mohamed Ali as their leader. The arrival in another village only a few hours before dawn, when he had thrown himself upon a mattress, tired to the core of his being and regardless of whether he was now the prisoner of black

Wahda, of Mohamed Ali, or of *Shaitan* himself.

He lay now and stared up at the thatched roof of the spacious hut wherein he had slept, watched idly a gray spider swinging back and forth at the end of its thread, seeking anchorage for the filament. He felt rested; energy and interest again tingled within him, and he stretched his body luxuriously, mentally thanking Mohamed Ali for having given him a mattress to sleep upon instead of hard matting on the cold earth. Then, sitting up and lighting a cigaret, he devoted his thought to a consideration of the new arrangement. He recalled what he knew of Mohamed Ali. And it was no little, for his name was known even in far lands.

In America it had been on every lip not long before, when Mohamed Ali, driven by the Sultan and other enemies from the *bashalik* of Tangier, had retaliated by seizing the person of a wealthy American and surrendering him only after the United States, represented by two warships, had forced the Sultan to concede Mohamed Ali's terms—terms which included ransom, arms and ammunition for himself and his followers, and the restoration of his official honors. A clever political move, Travers had thought at the time, harming no one, not even the American captive, who had found Mohamed Ali a gentleman.

But the act, because of the international importance of the Moroccan question, had echoed through the civilized world; and because it differed from the less direct political methods of a so-called civilization, earned for Mohamed Ali the name of bandit and outlaw, and gave rise to both deliberate and unintentional falsehoods concerning him. France especially, desiring that conditions in Morocco should be disturbed so that she might interfere and seize the country, made great capital of Mohamed Ali's action, and eventually brought on the infamous Conference of Algeciras—a conference which, by practically excluding Germany from North Africa, was one of the spreading roots of the world war which was to tear the world apart in later years.

Travers had read the garbled and exaggerated press accounts at the time, and having lived in Morocco, could see beyond them to what were essentially the facts in the case. He had been under no illusion concerning the necessity for the act, so far as Mohamed Ali was concerned, and discounted by ninety-nine per cent. the tales which followed.

Since his return to Morocco he had heard stories concerning this same Mohamed Ali, a political outlaw again through treachery of supposed friends and the plots of enemies. Tales from both native and European sources. And while the latter pictured the big brown man as a disturber of the peace of nations—which perhaps he was—and a thorn in the flesh of a weak Sultan—which he unquestionably was—the former gave a different portrait, a portrait of a Moorish Robin Hood, bravely defending himself and his followers, doing what he could to keep his country becoming a subject nation to a European power, keeping alive in the hearts of the Riffian Berbers that spirit of independence which had kept them free for over three thousand years—free from Phenician and Roman, Arab and Spaniard and Portuguese, English and French, all of whom had invaded and possessed parts or all of the country—except for the hills and mountains of the Atlas Range, wherein the sons of Atlas acknowledged no master but their gods.

Reviewing these things, the American, for some reason which did not formulate itself in words, even in his own mind, felt more content with his present captivity. The great laughter of the big outlaw echoed in his ears; surely no man who could laugh like that would be dangerous in petty ways.

Perhaps—the thought flashed through his head—perhaps if Mohamed Ali was really trying to prevent his country from being gobbled up by Europe, he might make of him an ally in this matter of the concession. Assuredly one so wise as Mohamed Ali could not fail to see the inevitable effect of the gaining of the concession by either France or Germany.

But fast upon the heels of this thought came a question: Why had Mohamed Ali taken him prisoner? The raid upon the village could have been for no other reason, he reflected. What was the outlaw's purpose? How had he known that he, Travers, was there? That Mohamed Ali had spies in Tangier City was certain, but how could those spies have known what had happened? Unless— Was it possible after all that the original abduction had been instigated by Mohamed Ali himself as a means to cover his trail?

Travers considered this for a moment and dismissed it, failing to see where the outlaw had covered his trail at all in the raid. It was not possible that he was working hand in hand with either the Frenchman or the German. Yet he, Travers, had been warned against native plotters also; perhaps some of the events in Tangier were due to Mohamed Ali.

But he had to reject the suggestion. Mohamed Ali would not try to poison him one day and then release him from captivity the next; if he had been planning his death that would have been accomplished best during the raid upon the village.

No, there seemed only one deduction which would hold: The outlaw, having learned in some way of the American's captivity, had rescued him for purposes of his own; perhaps to force his own pardon from the Sultan and to gain his return to power; perhaps for some other reason. It remained to be seen.

AT THIS point in the American's reflections the door opened and Achmido entered, limping. He greeted Travers warmly, but his usually cheerful face was distressed.

No, he told Travers, in reply to an inquiry, his foot bothered him very little. What did bother him was that Mohamed Ali had bade him prepare to go to his own village, and:

"I told him, *sidi*, that I would not go unless you go with me."

"And he said?" questioned Travers.

"He laughed," replied Achmido simply, "and commanded that I should depart within the hour."

Travers remembred the laughter he had heard a little while before.

"It is well," he told Achmido. "It is best that you should go. Your family will be distressed at your absence, and——"

He paused, not wishing to hurt his friend by telling him there was nothing he could do.

"Yes, it is best. Go you to your house, and when I am free again I will pay you the promised visit."

Achmido shook his head sadly.

"I should not go, *sidi*, for that or any other reason, except that Mohamed Ali commands it—as he commands also that I shall not divulge within the space of seven days that you are his captive. Wherefore it is not what I desire, but what must be. Men in Anghera do not disobey Mohamed Ali's orders. Or if they do—well, they do not enjoy their disobedience, or profit by it. He would drive me away."

"That I can understand perfectly," offered Travers, and being glad that the matter was thus arranged for his friend, added: "It is well that such is the case. I know that you would never leave me of your own accord in such a situation as this. Nevertheless, I am glad in my heart that Mohamed Ali's orders may not be disobeyed."

He grasped his friend's hand in parting, patted the big fellow upon the shoulder—Achmido was on the verge of tears—and although himself feeling not at all certain of the outcome of his captivity, bade him cheerfully prepare his house to receive him as a guest in a short time—and above all things to ascertain where the best boar-shooting could be found near his village. Achmido turned upon him, seized the American's shoulders in his big hands and shook him gently. Then without another word he left the hut.

After the departure of Achmido, Travers felt a great loneliness descend upon him, and the cheerful words he had spoken to his native friend echoed mockingly in his ears. Somehow the companionship of the big, simple fellow had been a source of strength to him; his whole-hearted friendship had been like that friendship which a dog may give a man, but which one man so rarely gives another. There was nothing in it of abasement nor inferiority; Achmido, like the mastiff, gave to the limit of his intelligence all that he had, and approached the gods in so doing.

While the American was reflecting thus, breakfast was brought to him by a native boy; a hearty meal, well prepared. To Travers' surprize, among the dishes of food sat an unopened box of his favorite cigarets.

"My master says to tell you," spoke the servant in Spanish, "that you may smoke these cigarets in perfect safety; he does not deal in poison. Also, if there is anything else you desire you have but to tell me. I am to serve you, and I shall always be near your door. If you care to walk about the village you are at liberty to do so."

"I would like to see your master," replied Travers, "to thank him for his courtesy, and—to talk of other things."

The youth shook his head.

"It is impossible at present, *sidi*," he said.

"My master has gone on a journey. He will not return until midday."

"*M'zien,*" replied Travers. "I will see him then. *Inshallah.*"

"You speak Arabic, then?"

There was surprize in the servant's voice.

Travers nodded, and told him in the boy's own tongue that he had lived in the country before and that he had spent much time among the Anghera Hills, where he now judged himself to be.

"I am from the village of Nonwish in Anghera," the boy told him, and Travers started.

"How old are you?" he asked, and the boy told him.

"Fourteen? Then perhaps you would not remember Sidi Abdelmalek 'Mer'cani, the *Nasrini*, who was chief of your village and other villages when you were ten years old."

At the question the boy considered Travers closely. Then his eyes opened wide.

"You are Sidi Abdelmalek!" he exclaimed. "Is it not true?"

"Yes, it is true," Travers told him. "I was so known."

"I remember now," said the boy. "But I paid little attention to people at that time. Mostly I was out in the hills."

"And now," continued Travers, "I am the captive of Mohamed Ali."

He watched the boy's face closely, but apparently the youth had been well trained. No muscle of his face moved to indicate what he might be thinking.

"Yes, that is true," he agreed. "He is a very great and very wise man, Sid Mohamed. I will go now, but after you have eaten, if you wish to see the village, you have but to call me. Or you may go alone if you wish. Such are Sid Mohamed's orders."

Travers ate his breakfast in a leisurely manner, opened the box of cigarets with satisfaction, for his own supply had been exhausted, and then took advantage of Mohamed Ali's orders and went forth for a stroll. Strangely, the idea of attempting to escape had not occurred to him until that moment; and even as it intruded, he dismissed it. Perhaps he did so because of his knowledge that the very freedom accorded him by his captor would not have been granted had there been the slightest possibility of escape; but at the same time Travers was aware of another peculiar and inexplicable sensation; he felt almost as if he were voluntarily joining Mohamed Ali in the plans of the outlaw, instead of having been forced into them.

His hour's stroll through the village, and even outside the walls, where he noted that sentinels were posted, failed to give him any further idea as to what the people of the village thought of him. He met and spoke to men who returned his greeting or answered his questions courteously, volunteered no comments and made no inquiries, but went forthwith about their affairs. Children peeked at him shyly from doorways and around corners, and the women he chanced to meet modestly covered their faces with their *haiks* as he passed, dark eyes watching him curiously from behind the cloth.

Travers noted that the village was well stocked and well equipped. There were bounteous supplies of grain and fodder and many horses to consume it; cows grazed about the village and chickens pecked their way along the streets. Military accouterments of various sorts—saddles and guns and ammunition belts hung about in many places.

In fact, Travers judged, it had been for some time a military headquarters for Mohamed Ali and his men. He wondered why it had never been attacked and wiped out—and then, looking about him at the hills which rose on every hand, he saw that the village was in a natural hiding place, besides which he judged rightly that it was far from all beaten trails and well guarded by distant sentinels to give warning.

The morning passed swiftly and pleasantly, despite his frequent lapses into absorbed consideration of his predicament and its relationship to the matter of the concession. He dined well again at noon, and after the meal settled himself for a smoke in the shade of his hut.

Before his cigaret was finished he became aware of the approach of a body of horsemen. Shortly a little group clattered through the gateway of the village, headed by Mohammed Ali himself. Their horses were flecked with lather, and the riders sunk low in their saddles, betokening a hard ride. But even as Travers observed this, his attention was attracted to a man who rode in the center of the group.

"Feldmann!" he exploded. "Feldmann! The German is also a captive!"

XIV

THE desire of Travers to have communication with Mohamed Ali was great before; now, knowing that he had a fellow captive in the person of the German, it became acute. But Mohamed Ali rode past him with only a casual glance, manifestly intent upon business of importance.

Travers followed the little cavalcade slowly, saw the German taken from his horse and thrust into a house, the door of which was promptly closed and locked, while guards were stationed, and thought that perhaps now that the new prisoner had been disposed of he would have an opportunity for words with his captor. But he was doomed to disappointment. Mohamed Ali gave brisk orders; men came leading fresh horses, while others removed saddles and bridles from the first ones, and when the last girth was tightened Mohamed Ali swung to his seat, gave a command and, followed by his men, again dashed away from the village. Tired though they obviously were, the business afoot apparently was of too great importance to allow time for rest. Travers observed the exchange of horses with satisfaction; a horseman himself, he could but admire the man, outlaw or otherwise, who treated his mounts with consideration—even though he had no mercy for himself or his men.

Left again to his own devices, and finding the heat of the high sun unpleasant, he sought the shade of his hut and smoked many cigarets while he considered the possible meaning of the presence of Mohamed Ali's prisoner, Herr Feldmann. He was conscious of a feeling of glee which he knew to be boyish, but equally natural, and to which he surrendered. It was good to see the man who he was sure had plotted against him, getting a little of what he felt was coming to him.

Travers remembered the button with the double eagle and resolved that he would make an opportunity if it were possible, to have a talk with the German; Mohamed Ali's village seemed a particularly good place to argue out the matter which he had in mind.

But after his natural enjoyment of the German's situation had subsided, his mind approached more weighty and complicated affairs. He could not ignore the manifest evidence that the captivity of the German was no doubt due to the same causes which had resulted in his own seizure by Mohamed Ali.

What was the outlaw's game? Between them he had hostages which would guarantee him anything he might desire. But somehow Travers felt that this was not entirely a matter of Mohamed Ali's personal affairs. It all fitted somehow into the net of conspiracy with which he had been enmeshed ever since he had set foot in Tangier. This conspiracy had to do with, was the outgrowth of, the business of the concession; wherefore, he argued, the captivity of himself and the German by Mohamed Ali manifestly being part of the conspiracy, was concerned with the concession.

But at this point in his analysis he found himself in a *cul-de-sac*. What had Mohamed Ali, the outlaw, with huge prices upon his head, to do with the business of the Sultan's Government?

The American mulled over this point at length. The situation conflicted. Granted that Mohamed Ali was acting from patriotic motives, his capture of the German might be explained; but this explanation ceased to explain when he considered that Mohamed Ali also held himself a prisoner, whereas if impelled by patriotism Mohamed Ali should have let him remain free, knowing that the gaining of the concession by an American would have no political significance, which was not true of any European agent.

Finally his thoughts started to travel in a circle; and, thrusting aside his problem, he lay down upon his bed, resolved to take a *siesta* and forget about them for the time being. But after an hour's vain effort to sleep he arose and sought the doorway of the hut wherein the German had been placed. There the servant boy joined him.

"Is it forbidden that I speak to the other captive?" he asked the youth.

The boy considered a moment, scratching his head.

"My master gave orders," he finally replied, "that thou couldst do whatever thou didst wish, within reason. And he gave orders concerning the German that he was not to be permitted to leave the hut. I can not see that thy desire to talk with him will be a violation of either order. Wherefore——"

He spoke to the guards, one of whom

threw open the door for Travers and permitted him to pass.

HE FOUND Feldmann sitting upon the floor in a corner of the room, fussing with the ropes which bound his hands, trying to reach and unfasten the knots. The German looked up, and his scowl grew blacker even than it had been. His gaze traveled over Travers from head to foot and back to the eyes again.

"So!" he growled. "So! It iss you at the bottom of this —— outrage, eh? Vait und see. You und your precious friend, Mohamed Ali, can not kidnap a friend of the All-Highest thus. Soon vill be a varship in Tangier harbor. No; you can not kidnap me like this."

Travers grinned. This was too good to be true—the German thinking that he, Travers, had caused his seizure by Mohamed Ali! This was worth all the unpleasantness of his own double captivity. Yes, worth even the poisoned cigarets.

"I say you can not do it!" shouted the German again.

Travers' grin widened.

"It would seem," he observed, "as though it *had* been done. *Un fait accompli*, as it were. You remind me of a story—would you like to hear it?"

"—— you und your stories," shouted the German, crimson with anger at the grin on Travers' face, at his flippancy and at the thought that Travers had outplayed him.

"Very well," agreed Travers regretfully, "but it is a good story."

"*Ja!*" grunted Feldmann hoarsely. "Also I myself vill tell you a good story. Ven the varship comes to Tangier you vill not think it iss such a good story."

In his anger he was getting somewhat mixed.

"But," inquired Travers at a venture, seating himself and lighting a cigaret, "but—how will they know what has happened to you?"

It was a shot in the dark. He had not the slightest idea of the manner in which the German had been captured. At the same time he felt fairly certain that Mohamed Ali would not leave a very clear trail behind him.

"Does all Tangier, then, know what has happened to you?" he asked.

"All Tangier?" cried the German. "Tangier knows nodding vatsoever about it. I vas not in Tangier, fool; I vas on my vay to El K'sar. But you know that—of course."

So the German was on his way to El K'sar. There must be new developments of which he was unaware.

Oh—then of course the Kaiser will already know what has happened to you."

The German looked at him through narrowed eyelids which slowly raised: he seemed to be remembering something.

"*Gott in himmel!*" he cried. "There vas no one——"

Abruptly he bit off the words, but Travers could guess the rest; the German had been captured by Mohamed Ali on the road to El K'sar, and there was no one to tell the story; no one to send word to the German Legation, nor to Wilhelmstrasse.

"Perhaps," suggested Travers soothingly, "perhaps they will send two warships instead of one."

The German growled like an angry mastiff.

"You laugh now. You laugh now. But vait!"

Travers took from his vest pocket the little metal button with the double eagle and tossed it carelessly in his palm.

"Well, perhaps," he reflected aloud, "a German warship can do what your poisoned cigarets failed to do. But when you go calling with such a purpose you should see to it that your buttons are more securely sewed on. You should marry, Feldmann—I understand you are a bachelor. You should marry, by all means, so that you would not lose your buttons so indiscriminately."

"Vat do you talk about!" snarled the German. "Vat iss this crazy talk of cigarets und buttons und vives? I haf all the buttons und all the vives I vant, und I do not smoke cigarets."

"At least not the kind that you fixed up for me," retorted Travers. "Ever see this before?"

He stuck the button under Feldmann's nose, so that the German was forced to look at it cross-eyed.

"Himmel!" cried the German, pushing Travers' hand back. "I do not vant to eat it. Vot iss it?" He gazed at it and grunted. "Ach—it iss one of my blouse buttons—no? Vere did you get it?"

Travers was taken aback. Not so much at the words as at the evident tone of sincerity.

"I loos them—many times," went on the

German. "Of course. Naturally. All men loos their buttons, married or single. But vat of it? Vat hass it to do mit the matter?"

Travers scratched his nose and studied the German. Either the man was a better actor than Travers had ever before encountered, or he was not guilty of the charge which the American had mentally preferred against him. The sneering, smiling face of de Beaumont rose mystically before Travers. A "plant," he thought, and was about to feel guilty of having done an injustice to the German when he suddenly remembered something else. But concerning this something else he kept quiet for the moment.

"Do you know a boy named Larbi?" he asked. "A boy who was a groom to the Secretary of the Belgian Legation in Tangier when he was killed?"

"No Secretary of the Belgian Legation in Tangier vas efer killed," replied the German. "But do you mean the boy who brought you a horse ven you first came to Tangier?"

"I do."

"Vell, I know him. That iss, I know who he iss—und vat he iss. He iss no good."

"Did he ever work for you?" inquired Travers blandly.

"*Himmel*, no!" exclaimed the German. "I vould not haf him under any circumstances. His father vas— Vy do you ask about him? Und vat about the button?"

"The cigarets in my room at the hotel were changed for others which had been poisoned," said Travers. "The result was that a hotel boy died. This button was found in my room at the time."

His eyes met those of Feldmann, and the gaze was returned steadily.

"No, you are wrong," said the German, shaking his head. "I see vat you thought. You thought that I had poisoned your cigarets, no?"

"Of course," admitted Travers quietly.

"But I did not. No, I vould not do it. If you find Larbi you find the egsplanation. The button vas put there to make you think vat you did think. Yess. That is quite sure."

Travers agreed with him. He could not refuse to accept the explanation. Truth was in the German's eyes and in his voice—but with it was something else, which brought Travers again to the matter he had been holding back. If the German had not been responsible for the poisoned cigarets, perhaps he was equally guiltless of the poisoned drink at the café. Maybe those things could be charged to the account of de Beaumont.

But Travers felt strongly that the German must have plotted against him, and that as there remained only his original abduction to be explained, Feldmann must have been responsible for that. Or was Mohamed Ali, as had occurred to him? Or some other native influence? Despite his uncertainty he sprung a question at the German.

"I do not know the present wage of assassins," he said. "Did it cost you much to arrange for my death at the hands of Wahda, the black thug?"

The German was startled. He opened his lips to speak and closed them again in silence. Then:

"Assassins—I did not——"

He was interrupted by a shouting outside the hut, which was followed by a clattering of horses' hoofs and by a deep-toned laughter. Travers knew it for Mohamed Ali's laugh, and rose quickly and looked from the door. Then he nearly sat down in the German's lap. Two of Mohamed Ali's men were lifting a third man from a horse, a European, whose hands were tied.

"*Yalatif! Yalatif!* It is impossible!" he thought, and stared stupidly.

"Vat iss it? Vat iss it?" The voice of the German demanded to know.

Travers turned with an expression of astonishment upon his lips; abruptly remembered that the German thought him to be working hand in hand with Mohamed Ali, and resolved to let his opponent continue under that misapprehension. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Only de Beaumont," he said, "and that precious youth, Larbi."

He turned back to watch the Frenchman, unheeding the German's reiterated:

"I said so! I said so! You und Mohamed Ali. I said so!"

XV

THAT night Travers had his talk with Mohamed Ali. The outlaw had been inaccessible until after the evening meal, and Travers rightly judged that he was getting a much needed rest. He could now vision what the activities of the day had been for Mohamed Ali and his men; a ride of at least fifteen miles to the El K'sar road and return with the person of Feldmann; another swift ride and return with de Beaumont.

Travers, knowing that the German had been *en route* to El K'sar, guessed that the Frenchman had been following, although the reason for this sudden exodus from Tangier was beyond his imagination. Two journeys to the El K'sar road then and return, with the El K'sar road, Travers estimated, fifteen miles away at its nearest point. Sixty miles of hard riding; it required little imagination to understand Mohamed Ali's need for rest. But when the servant boy brought him his supper he asked the youth to present to Mohamed Ali his request for permission to speak with him; and the boy, returning shortly, told him to come to the outlaw's house in an hour.

Now he sat upon the cushion to which Mohamed Ali had waved him upon his entrance. Opposite, upon a similar cushion, sat the outlaw, smoking a cigaret, and between them a great brass tray upon an eight-inch-high table, bearing the remains of the evening meal.

"You have been comfortable?" asked Mohamed Ali, passing the American the cigarets. "I have been quite busy. Too busy, in fact, properly to attend to my duties as host."

He grinned cheerfully upon the American.

"Perfectly comfortable," replied Travers. "And I have seen that you were much occupied. Assuredly you spare no effort to make sure that your guests will find your house."

Travers spoke in Arabic in preference to the Spanish which Mohamed Ali had used; the Arabic was a much better instrument to play upon with such a man as this.

The outlaw chieftain nodded, and with mock seriousness said—

"Surely the least I could do for those who accept my invitations is to escort them with all speed to the place of my hospitality."

"I trust," retorted Travers, "that the invitations did not embarrass them."

Mohamed Ali grinned broadly.

"No—" He seemed to be reflecting. "No, I do not believe that they were embarrassed. They spoke, it is true, of affairs at El K'sar which needed their immediate attention. This was scarcely true courtesy, in view of my invitation; but I pointed out that there is always another day to attend to matters of business; also that not every day did they receive an invitation from Mohamed Ali to become his guests. And so—I persuaded them."

His face was serious, but there was a twinkle in his eyes.

"A good actor," reflected Travers, and laughed freely.

His laughter was contagious, and the big outlaw drowned it with his own.

"Persuade—persuade—most assuredly," said Travers finally. "Your persuasion is most—hm—most persuasive, as I know from experience. But I wonder—" His tone grew serious. "I wonder concerning the reason for this little house party of of Mohamed Ali."

He used the English words "house party," knowing well that Mohamed Ali's years of contact with European officials would have made him acquainted with the term, and no Arabic word that he could recall seemed to mean quite the same.

Mohamed Ali chuckled as he considered the question.

"Perhaps," he answered, "it is that I grew lonely, and longed for the company of others—in order to discover what is being done and said and thought in the big world outside. Perhaps it was that I came to realize the demands of hospitality toward the strangers within our gates. And perhaps——"

The American interrupted him with a snort.

"And perhaps," he offered, "it was because his Majesty's Grand Vizier had a belly pain from too much *kesk'soo*."

Again Mohamed Ali's great laugh thundered.

"You do not know—you do not know the Vizier," he gasped. "He is long and thin as the bamboo staff of a holy man, and he eats as a bird eats, for fear that he will become fat. Ho, ho, ho! A belly pain would tie him into six knots, and they would all be in that part of his body covered by his belt."

He howled with mirth.

"You have given me a picture, Sidi Travers. I shall see it every time I think of his Excellency, the Vizier. He is long enough so that six knots would make little difference, as in a string."

Travers waited until the howls died into gurgles, and the gurgles into chuckles, and the chuckles into swallowings. Then:

"It is no doubt most amusing—but to tell the truth not so amusing to me as the presence in Mohamed Ali's house of Herr Feldmann, a bidder for the mining concession; of Maurice de Beaumont, a bidder for the mining concession; and of James J. Travers, a bidder for the mining concession. My father had a nose," he ended.

"Also," added Mohamed Ali, "a sense of humor, I think, for which you should be thankful. But assuredly you did not wish to remain a prisoner of the black man who desired to shoot you?"

"Certainly not," agreed Travers. "Neither did I desire to die by poisoned cigarets, nor by arsenic in my whisky and soda, nor in fact by any other means."

"I have heard," Mohamed Ali told him. "Such are the tricks of cowards. No doubt they will be punished in good time."

"But touching upon the matter of the black who would have killed me—" Travers looked keenly at Mohamed Ali. "I have thought that that was not a European trick—as the others perhaps were."

The outlaw's face was an expressionless mask.

"You mean," he asked softly, "that you think I hired the black to seize and to kill you?"

"No, Sid Mohamed," Travers answered, meeting the outlaw's level look, "I do not think that is your way. I meant that it seemed to me to be a native plot. In Tangier I observed certain things—a native youth who seemed to follow me, a *djellaba* and slipper merchant in a shop on the main street, where the youth was frequently to be seen. And there were warnings from native sources. Wherefore——"

"Wherefore," Mohamed Ali interrupted him, "wherefore you suspect that some of us, some of my countrymen, were plotting against you."

"Precisely."

"A *djellaba* and slipper merchant on the main street," soliloquized the outlaw chief. "That was perhaps one called Hadj Hamed?"

"Such, I believe, was his name," assented Travers.

Mohamed Ali nodded his head slowly and shrugged his shoulders.

"Who knows?" he said. "Who knows? Still, perhaps you are mistaken. In Allah's good time all will be made clear. And in the meantime——"

"It is the meantime that concerns me most," Travers cut in. "It would seem that to complete your work you should now add to your house guests three others."

He looked at Mohamed Ali with amusement showing in his eyes.

"Three others?" questioned the outlaw, his face puzzled.

"I mean the three members of the Concessions Committee," explained Travers. "Then business could go on as usual. You have the bidders, but——"

He stopped, and Mohamed Ali's laughter broke forth again.

"*Allah kerim!*" he cried. "I had not thought of that. No; it had not occurred to me, or, as Allah is my witness, I should have done it. Now I am certain your father had a sense of humor as well as a nose. Perhaps it is not too late— Yes—I fear it is."

He looked at Travers for a space with unseeing eyes. He was following some line of thought which caused him suddenly to roar again. Calming at last, he spoke:

"However, my hospitality would be but poor compared with that which *they*, or two of them rather, are enjoying. They too took the El K'sar road—but yesterday—being invited by his Majesty the Sultan to become his guests."

Travers started; this had to do with the matter of the concession also.

"By guests you mean—" he hesitated—"in the same sense that I am *your* guest!" he added softly.

Mohamed Ali nodded ponderously.

"They go to El K'sar as prisoners," he said. "Some one—Allah *knows* who; I only suspect—acquainted his Majesty with the prices which each of the committee members had been paid by your fellow guests. Wherefore, as of course you did not know, his Majesty sent a royal command to Tangier, relieving them from their onerous duties and summoning them to the radiance of his smile at El K'sar."

"But why El K'sar?" inquired Travers. "Is his Majesty not at Fez?"

Mohamed Ali's head expressed negation.

"No," he answered. "He is at El K'sar for a while. And — quite incidentally — while there— Let me think." He smiled whimsically. "Yes—three days hence—he will personally consider the bids and award the mining concession."

The American stared at the outlaw in amazement.

"*Yalatif!*" he breathed. "*Yalatif!*—The Subtle One——"

It was all he could say for the moment, but it seemed to cover the situation. It referred to Mohamed Ali. His Majesty waited in El K'sar for the arrival of the three bidders for the concession, and those three bidders were guests of Mohamed Ali, outlaw, and the time of the award was three days hence. What did it all mean?

He studied the face of Mohamed Ali. What was going on in the brain behind those placid brown eyes?

The daring plots of Mohamed Ali were famous—but here was a situation which no one would have believed possible, even to such as he. Travers' vision reached out and surveyed the web of which this big brown man occupied the center. Or tried to do so; but its filaments stretched too far for even him to perceive their ends.

Here in Mohamed Ali's keeping were three men, three *Nasrini*, of whom the abduction of any one was sufficient to cause great confusion. So far as he himself was concerned, knowledge of his capitivity reaching the ears of the Department of State would result no doubt in warships being sent to Tangier Harbor, the town menaced and a demand made upon the Sultan for the instant compliance with the incredible terms which Mohamed Ali might make for the release of the American.

This was the least of all. Where the Frenchman and the German were concerned Travers saw the web stretch out until it came to the Quai d'Orsay in Paris and the Wilhelmstrasse in Berlin, saw France and Germany using the captivity of their nationals as excuses to throw troops into Moroccan territory and warships into Moorish waters, each striving to be first to utilize the situation for the extension of empire.

Beyond this he visioned, and saw a picture of France and Germany at each other's throats again over the Moroccan question. Saw Europe dividing along the lines of secret treaties—visioned a conflagration which should burn the life out of the continent.

Travers looked at Mohamed Ali and saw, not a big, brown, smiling figure who jested with his Sultan and with Europe—saw instead a mystic figure smiling in derision while he played idly with the fate of the world. He had a sudden great impulse to make this man in front of him understand what he was doing—but before he could speak, knowledge came to him that Mohamed Ali knew, even better than he himself knew, the dynamic power of the toys with which he played.

And consciously the fact came to him that Mohamed Ali would cause war in Europe without a moment's hesitation—would laugh and throw the European nations into the scrap heap—if he cared to do so. And whether he did so or not would depend—Travers was suddenly aware that he knew—upon whether such an act would benefit or harm Morocco.

The American became conscious of a feeling of fear of this laughing brown man, a fear caused by the very obvious fact that the brain behind those twinkling eyes was big enough to bring about war in Europe whenever he desired. More than once had France and Germany been on the verge of a declaration of hostilities over the Moroccan Question. Travers reflected that the "Moroccan Question" sat before him smoking cigarets, playing with words and shaking the hut with occasional laughter. Did all of these unreal happenings of the past few days concern the concession, after all—or did they portend a European catastrophe?

His own interest in the concession—the whole question of the concession faded into insignificance. The outlaw's next words, however, jerked his thoughts back to the concession.

"Three days hence," repeated Mohamed Ali.

"And will there be any bidders?" asked Travers with an effort; bidders and concessions seemed unreal.

"Doubtless," answered Mohamed Ali. "Doubtless."

Travers questioned with his eyes. The outlaw shrugged his shoulders.

"It is not advisable," he said, "to guess at what is recorded on the as yet unturned pages of the Book of Fate.. You are my guest—so let us forget any business which might shorten your visit."

Travers smiled grimly. He had the answer to his unspoken question. What Fate, in the form of Mohamed Ali, had in store for him was not to be known until the page was turned. Still he could not entirely give up the fight.

"Would you not rather that America should have the concession, which would then be non-political, than have France or Germany secure it, or some other European nation? You know what that would mean."

"Of course," agreed Mohamed Ali. "Of course I know. But do you not overlook the fact that the Frenchman and the German are your fellow guests?"

"Then who, in Allah's name!" exclaimed Travers. "Who else is going to bid for the concession?"

Mohamed Ali smiled and yawned and stretched his big arms.

"I am extremely tired yet," he said.

Travers took the hint, rose and bade his host good night.

"Oh, by the way, I forgot to tell you," Mohamed Ali chuckled. "De Beaumont saw you this evening, strolling at liberty about the village, and I am afraid he misjudged you."

Travers smiled, thinking of the conclusion to which the German had jumped.

"Feldmann also," he said. "I suppose you mean that de Beaumont thought I had employed you to abduct him?"

"He so believes. And I think that shortly I shall be misjudged further still. Sometimes it is unfortunate," he sighed, "to have the name of outlaw."

Travers sought his hut and went to bed, to turn from one side to the other for hours puzzling his head over the situation, and seeking sleep in vain.

XVI

TRAVERS faced his problem again the next morning after spending restless hours in the night before sleep came to him. In the situation one fact only seemed to stand out with any clarity. Regardless of all other factors, both explicable and inexplicable, if he were to make a bid for the concession he must reach the Sultan's presence in El K'sar before the expiration of the second day hereafter, and in order to do so he would have to escape from the village of Mohamed Ali.

He felt that he had no illusions concerning his captor; Mohamed Ali was a pleasant companion and a considerate host, but whatever his purpose might be, the result of the carrying out of that purpose was, among other things, to prevent Travers, James J., from presenting a bid for the concession. He could readily see where his own captivity might be necessary to Mohamed Ali's plans, but he did not perceive that he was under any obligations to set those plans above his own, particularly as he had not the slightest conception of what they were intended to effect.

He had seen enough of the world to know that there are men in it who are most charming individuals and yet who bring disaster to those who are forced to admire them. He did not classify Mohamed Ali precisely in this little group, but he did consider him as being at the present moment the only menace to his own plans for making the bid. With the Frenchman and the German held captive and out of the way, it was extremely probable that the concession would be his—unless new bidders had arisen very recently, bidders who were permitted to remain at liberty by Mohamed Ali, working beneath the mantle of his protection.

Travers did not think that there were such bidders despite what Mohamed Ali had said; none of the smaller nations would interfere or permit their nationals to interfere in an affair between France and Germany, with America unexpectedly playing a part.

Abruptly an entirely new thought came to Travers. Did Mohamed Ali perhaps count upon his making his escape from the village and reaching El K'sar? Was this the reason that he was given freedom of the place, permitted to pass about as he did, unguarded? Was this the reason for the outlaw's unquestioned courtesy and companionability? Travers knew something of the way the Moorish mind functions, could readily understand how Mohamed Ali might get some amusement from playing with him—but there seemed to him to be definite weaknesses in the argument that he might be at liberty to go.

He realized that possession of a horse would be a fundamental necessity; he could not make his escape afoot, across the level lands of the valley, in full view of the village. A horse, and a swift one, with an advantage of two or three minutes' start, might give him a fighting chance.

However, whether his escape was to be made with permission or without, it remained the only thing to be attempted, the only course which would enable him to carry out his plans. Wherefore, after he had breakfasted he went for a stroll through the village with the intention of making a break for liberty if the opportunity offered and of sizing up his chances at least.

The possibility which he had in mind,

that he might come upon a horse in a part of the village where he could mount and get away, he soon found to be a thought only. He circled the inside walls of the village and saw not a horse until he reached a point where there were stables. There were horses there a plenty—but a guard for almost every horse.

He continued to walk to the entrance gate, passed through and was greeted politely by a guard, who made no move to stop him or to follow him. He circled the village, finding an unbroken wall of cactus and aloe higher than his head, and reentered through the same gate that he had gone out of.

A horse was his only chance, that was obvious. He wondered whether he could bribe one of the guards at the stables; no other method suggested itself. He might fight one man or three men, but not twenty with a score of others within calling distance.

He might ask permission to ride a while. No doubt one of Mohamed Ali's men would ride with him. He might give him the slip, might overcome him—except that he had no weapons.

He returned to his hut to smoke and ponder the immediate problem, feeling that a wall, though invisible, held him as safely as would walls of stone. Scarcely had he squatted upon the cushions when he heard a horse dash into the village and gallop past his hut. The rider demanded speech with Mohamed Ali.

An hour later he had decided that in due course he would go to the stables, prepared either to bribe a guard or seize a horse by force or trickery—whichever seemed to offer the best chance for success. Further consideration of the details of the matter was interrupted by sounds of activity in the village. He looked out just as he heard the deep voice of Mohamed Ali calling for a horse, and saw the big back of the bandit going down the road, accompanied by Feldmann. Soon they stopped, not far from the opening to Travers' hut, and a horse was brought up which, to his surprize, he saw the German mount.

Feldmann, glancing back, became aware of Travers standing in the doorway. He turned his horse and, approaching the American, flung a sentence at him, in his own form of English:

"Vat has been sold vonce may be bought again." There was a snarl in his voice. "But not a third time choost at present, I think."

He whirled his horse and dashed off, saluting Mohamed Ali perfunctorily as he passed. Through the gate he rode and out of sight—to liberty, Travers realized.

Anger shook the American. The meaning of the German's words was clear. Feldmann, supposing that Travers had engaged the services of Mohamed Ali to make him captive, had in turn bribed the outlaw to let him go. Travers, staring somewhat blindly out of his hut, became aware that Mohamed Ali was approaching him, chuckling at something which seemed to amuse him immensely.

Travers turned his back upon the outlaw and sat down upon his mattress. Mohamed Ali's bulk filled the doorway; a deep voice greeted him. Travers shrugged.

"I have no money to pay for ransom."

His voice was quiet and his face hard. The outlaw chieftain gazed at him a moment quizzically, and then broke into his familiar roar of laughter.

"It is most amusing," he said when he could speak again. "Most amusing. *Y'Allah!*"

"No doubt you find it so," retorted Travers.

"Ah, yes; indeed, I find it so," agreed Mohamed Ali. "Did I not tell you last night that I thought I should be misjudged again today?"

"I am not misjudging you, I am sure."

"*La la,*" said Mohamed Ali hastily. "I did not mean you. I meant him who has just ridden away so cheerfully for El K'sar."

Travers grunted.

"I do not think," he observed, "that he could have seriously misjudged you; he seems to have accomplished his purpose."

"Hmph!" There was something of a snort in Mohamed Ali's ejaculation. "You are inclined to be disagreeable. But never mind—perhaps you have reason. We should be lenient. But I think the German did misjudge me seriously. You see—" the big man chuckled again—"you see, he thought that you had paid me to hold him captive, and so he paid me again to let him go. I think that was most amusing."

"I trust he paid you enough to satisfy you for betraying your country."

Travers' gibe seemed to pass harmlessly over Mohamed Ali's head.

"*Aiwa, sidi, aiwa!* He paid well indeed.

These Germans are always well supplied with money. Besides—he paid me, you see, not only for letting him go, but for keeping you here."

"What!" shouted Travers, jumping to his feet.

"Yes, indeed," Mohamed Ali assured him, nodding his head seriously, but with a smile in his eyes. "He paid me for both—and well for both. His money is good, even though it be Christian money. Better perhaps than our own, for the cause of Islám. And thereby you see that he misjudged me twice—because I had intended to keep you here anyway."

Travers could only scowl blackly and wonder how he had almost reached the point of admiration for this big, brown man.

"I promised him—it was the bargain—" continued Mohamed Ali, "that I should keep you with me for the next three days. And that I shall do. Mohamed Ali is a man of his word."

Travers' sniff expressed doubt, and the German's words came back to him. "But not again at present." He wondered; perhaps——

He turned upon Mohamed Ali.

"Will you tell me," he asked, "how much the German paid you—for keeping me?"

"Why not?" inquired the outlaw. "He paid me all that he had with him—a matter of approximately a thousand pounds sterling."

"Five thousand dollars," murmured Travers. "Very well. I do not carry funds like that with me—but I will give you an equal amount to let me go—in time to reach El K'sar to place my bid."

"No more than that?" asked Mohamed Ali, his face and voice expressionless.

Travers stared at him, but could read nothing there. Was the man bluffing? Very well. He thought of the millions behind his friend "Emperor" Lee.

"I will double it for my liberty—and a horse."

No sooner had he uttered the last phrase than he regretted it, thinking of his intention to try to escape and that by thus speaking he had indicated his own appreciation of the fact that a horse was a necessity. He scanned Mohamed Ali's face quickly, but saw no change of expression there. But even as he looked, the brown face crinkled, the lips grew wide, and laughter flooded the hut.

"Ho, ho, ho!" roared Mohamed Ali. "It is indeed good sport. Ho, ho, ho! But I was guilty of error—I should have heard you first, and after you the German. But it is impossible, my friend. Quite impossible. In the first place, you have not the money."

"My word is as good as Mohamed Ali's," returned Travers, meeting the other's eyes.

"Perhaps better, perhaps better," agreed the outlaw mildly. "Nevertheless, I am forced to do business like some of the merchants of the *Nasrini*—for cash in hand only. Besides——"

"I will send for the money to Tangier," interrupted Travers. "There is yet time."

But the big brown man shook his head.

"Besides," he continued, "I do not wish to do so. And even ten thousand pounds can not make Mohamed Ali do what he does not wish to do."

He turned and shuffled away, giving Travers no opportunity for further words.

Travers threw himself upon his mattress and cursed lengthily and earnestly; cursed Mohamed Ali for being what he was; cursed the German for having been able to bribe the outlaw; cursed himself for having harbored a friendly feeling toward the big brown man, and finally succeeded in relieving himself still further by cursing the entire situation and the concession itself, in four languages. Therefore, feeling better, he resumed consideration of the only chance remaining to him—escape.

IT WAS growing dark when he left his hut again to put his luck to the touch. Unopposed, he made his way to the stables where, to his surprize, he found now only a single man on guard. Offering the fellow a cigaret, he struck up a conversation with him and found him to be a slow-witted young man whose services were used only about the stables. After a little talk Travers, affecting a yawn, said:

"It would be pleasant indeed to go for a little ride in the twilight. I am accustomed to more exercise than I have had here. However—I do not wish to bother Sid Mohamed about a horse. Of course if there were a horse I could use a little while——"

He paused and stared off toward the hills, trying to give the impression that the matter was of no importance to him.

"I would pay you for your trouble," he

added, and brought a roll of bills from his pocket.

"Why not, *sidi* " asked the fellow. "If you wish to ride—I have no orders against it. Of course——"

Travers looked at him keenly and noted the hesitation. He was not sure, but he thought that there was an expression in the man's eyes which indicated that he knew what he was doing and expected to be paid for it.

"Of course——"

He repeated the fellow's words suggestively.

"I was about to say that perhaps I should ask Sid Mohamed," replied the stable man. "But——"

His glance seemed to fall upon the money as he added:

"I see no need to do so. There is a horse ready saddled near by."

The American thrust the entire roll of bills into the native's brown hand, but the fellow did not even look at them; merely held them and led Travers along the stable. The American could not know that the man had never seen American money in his life and could not have told, even upon examination, whether his fist contained one dollar or a thousand.

In a few paces they came to the place where a saddled horse was tied. The stable man unhitched it and Travers swung into the saddle, having in mind the road which led to the village gate. Part of the way he could go back of the stables, out of sight of the villagers, but at last there would be a length of perhaps a hundred yards where he would have to depend upon surprize and speed.

He reached this point without interception, dug spurs into his horse and sped for the gate, looking behind at every breath to see whether he had attracted the attention of the village. He could not see the gateway, a mere gap in the cactus hedge, until he was within ten feet of it, owing to the fact that he had been riding along the inside of the hedge itself; but when his horse had only three leaps more to gain the gate, galloping wildly, Travers suddenly threw his entire weight upon the reins in an endeavor to stop the excited animal.

Three heavy iron chains had been stretched across the opening, attached to massive posts hidden by the cactus. The highest chain was as high as his head.

"For my liberty—and a horse," his own words echoed in his ears.

Mohamed Ali had heard and noted! He guided the horse past the gate and pulled it to a canter. Looking back, he saw that two guards had taken position at the gate. He wheeled his mount and rode back, nodding to the guards as he passed.

"This horse is a bad one," he observed aloud, bluffing and wishing he had been more discreet in his use of money.

Before he reached the stables he met Mohamed Ali, strolling slowly along the road. The outlaw stopped him with upraised hand, then fished something from his *shakarah*, which he handed to Travers with a faint smile. It was Travers' roll of bills—the roll he had given the stable man.

"Apparently you lost this in your gallop," observed Mohamed Ali.

"Perhaps," replied Travers with a shrug, and passed on.

XVII

NIGHT brought no consolation to Travers, and morning found him in a bitter mood—bitter against Mohamed Ali for having rescued him from his first captors only to buy and sell him as a chattel and to laugh greatly at the transactions; bitter at de Beaumont because of the poisoned drink and the fatal cigarets for which he now believed the Frenchman to have been responsible; bitter at Feldmann for having bribed Mohamed Ali, and for matters which he could not yet hold the German definitely responsible, but in which his intuition told him he had had a hand; bitter at the native forces which he thought he saw hazily behind Mohamed Ali; at the Black Magician whom he now believed to have played with him, knowing of the danger which awaited his feet; and at himself also, with that bitterness which is perhaps most acute because it is both given and received by oneself.

Not that he could see where he had erred; it was only that he had failed—and it was not his creed to excuse failure in a matter, nor to gloss it over by an analysis of the details which caused it. Knowing the country and its people; knowing too the ruthlessness of European agents, he should have been able to protect himself; and yet this very knowledge of the complicated subtlety which underlay all the political and official life of Morocco should have told him that a more ignorant man, or a more unscrupulous one, would have had better chances for success than he who met scrupulous plots, murderous intrigues, with the fair play which his nationality inspired.

But condemnatory as he was he could not avoid the realization that he understood very little of the problem of which he found himself a factor, as a fly finds himself a factor in the problem of the spider's web.

Abruptly he felt that his bitterness and condemnation was puerile. He knew that it was futile—but also he conceived the vision of the fly in the web berating the spider which he could not see. He realized that the Moorish fatalism which he believed had become an integral part of him was only a veneer, attached but weakly to his ego. Now it had stripped off, leaving bare the American unwillingness to accept even the apparently inevitable, to fight to the last ditch and beyond, for a purpose once decided upon. Disdainfully he thought of that great principle of fatalism, that what is written in the Book of Fate must be—despite all human efforts and desires and aspirations.

Surely the Creator did not create men to be his puppets; surely man was not born into this world with his future inscribed upon his soul as an inscription is made upon the disk of a phonograph, to be revealed heart beat by heart beat, day by day and year by year until a great silence should indicate that the record was ended. Surely human effort, resistance against the course of events, must accomplish something.

But again a picture came to his mind. A picture this time of the fly beating its wings in a vain effort to escape the web about it.

As if Fate, unknowable writer of the Book of Life, wished to emphasize this picture by a gibing gesture, events took place. A horseman cantered into the village and passed the door of Travers' hut. The hood of his white *sulham* concealed most of his face; but as he glanced toward Travers, who had stepped into the doorway, a pair of keen brown eyes and a straight nose above a close-clipped black mustache were visible.

There was something familiar about them; the American had an instinctive memory for faces—or parts of faces. He could not at once place this rider. He watched him intently until he swung to the ground in front of Mohamed Ali's house and strode toward the door, throwing the reins to a waiting guard. Then the *sulham* hood fell away a little, revealing more of the face, and Travers' eyes narrowed in recognition.

"The slipper merchant of the Siageen!" he exclaimed. "He who was called Hadj Hamed by Mohamed Ali. He in whose shop I so often saw the boy Mustapha."

Dejectedly he returned to his cushions and lighted a cigaret, which he smoked but did not taste. Here was more evidence, evidence that although the Frenchman and the German had undoubtedly plotted against him, tried for his life, they were not alone in their plottings.

Swiftly Travers reviewed events since he had set foot in Tangier, and in the array many things which had passed almost without notice now stood forth in significant proportions. Not a day had passed in Tangier, not a major movement of his had been made, that he had not apparently stumbled upon the boy Mustapha. Almost every time he had passed Hadj Hamed's little shop the boy had been either there or in the immediate vicinity. It was impossible now to avoid the conclusion; Mustapha was a spy for Hadj Hamed, who in turn was a spy for Mohamed Ali.

And Larbi, the other native boy, who had disappeared so suggestively before the poisoned cigarets could be smoked? If Feldmann spoke truth, the boy had lied about having served the Secretary of the Belgian Legation. Bigote had been jailed by a Moorish official, without reason given, and released without explanations. These two events, coinciding with the appearance and disappearance of Larbi, could have but one meaning; native forces had caused Bigote to be eliminated for the time, while his place might be taken by Larbi for the purpose of changing the cigarets. That seemed clear enough.

Followed his own capture by brigands who had acted under orders to seize him and assassinate him, but who later, in the nick of time, had had the latter part of their orders countermanded. Then had come Mohamed Ali's raid upon the village.

Travers pondered the mystery of that raid, its connection with other matters. If he had been executed, if the brigands' plans had not been changed by an order which had been greeted with the greatest awe, Mohamed Ali's raid would have been fruitless. Wherefore logic suggested that Mohamed Ali must have known of the countermanding of the order before making the raid. That the orders of the big brown outlaw would be considered with a vast respect by the average person was unquestionable. But if Mohamed Ali could countermand the order for Travers' death, assuredly it was to be judged that he was the one who had given the original command.

Travers was in no mood to doubt that if his death could benefit the plans of Mohamed Ali, whatever those plans were, his death would have taken place. And now the release of the German, free to go to El K'sar and make his bid for the concession.

Suddenly Travers remembered the arrival of a horseman an hour before the German had been set free, and pondered what it might mean. But he could not even guess. That it had some connection with the matter he felt certain; Mohamed Ali was scarcely the man to make a long, hard ride for the purpose of capturing the German on one day, and before another sun had set, to turn him free. Of course there was the matter of ransom the German had paid; but, even hating Mohamed Ali as he now hated him, Travers could not believe that this had been the outlaw's purpose in making a captive of the German—or of the Frenchman.

If gain alone had been his thought, he could have demanded, and would have received, ten times, twenty times, the thousand pounds that the German had paid. By letting him go Mohamed Ali had thrown away a fortune. Yet he had seemed so pleased at having got a small amount from Feldmann!

This childish pleasure over a small thing did not fit in with what Travers knew of Mohamed Ali. Yesterday it had rung false. Now it appeared only a pose by which the outlaw was masking a deeper plot.

But no amount of thought could give the American even a glimmering of what this plot might be. Wherefore, he turned to a consideration of Hadj Hamed's arrival and its causes. Yesterday a rider had come, and the German had been released. Today another rider had come. What would follow?

He was not left long in doubt. Upon the morning air came the deep laughter of Mohamed Ali. Travers rose and went to the doorway. Almost detail for detail was a picture of the day before repeated. A guard stood holding a saddled horse, Mohamed Ali beside him. A man, a European, swung into the saddle and turned the horse's head toward the village gate. But this time the man who mounted was not Feldmann, but de Beaumont.

Now was the American gripped in the throes of a perverse humor; no longer did the matter of the concession, of his own captivity, of the vicious tricks of fate, seem to be of any importance. What he wanted to do was to laugh, to laugh utterly without reason, in the face of the Frenchman and of Mohamed Ali. Men are sometimes seized by hysteria, as well as women.

Swiftly Travers approached the mounted man and the smiling outlaw. Wildly he laughed, as at a vast joke, howling with mirth, and when he reached them he was holding his sides and flapping his arms as a rooster flaps his wings.

"Ho, ho, ho!" he chortled. "Ho, ho, ho! Mohamed Ali's guests do not stay long. Mohamed Ali's village is only a resting place by the wayside. But a fine host is Mohamed Ali! Ho, ho, ho!"

He laughed within a foot of the outlaw's bewildered face, and turned to the mounted Frenchman.

"My friend de Beaumont!" he cried. "Is it really you? Why are you not in El K'sar, where the Sultan awaits you? You must ride swiftly, de Beaumont, for the German is ahead of you. Far ahead, de Beaumont. Ho, ho!"

Travers' burst of hysterical humor had queer results. The Frenchman stared down upon him with wondering eyes and wrinkled forehead and then glanced at Mohamed Ali. His face became menacing as he spoke to the outlaw.

"What is your game?" he snarled. "Why does this fool, your fellow conspirator, laugh? Have you tricked me, or are you planning to trick me?"

His face grew vicious.

"Even you had better not attempt that, Sid Mohamed," he threatened.

The big man looked from Travers to the Frenchman and back again to Travers, with puzzled eyes. That the American had suddenly gone crazy seemed probable, judging from his actions, but that the Frenchman did not think of this solution was equally apparent; and Mohamed Ali remembered that de Beaumont believed the American had conspired with him to take the Frenchman captive. Naturally he judged now that he was being tricked; that a joke was being played upon him. And Mohamed Ali found himself unable to explain convincingly.

"I think he has gone insane," he offered, but the Frenchman shook his head.

"*I* do not think so. *I* think you are planning more trickery. Would he be so much amused, having to remain here, unless such were the case? He will remain here? You have not lied about that?" he demanded.

Mohamed Ali's shoulders straightened a little.

"I have given my word," he answered, "that this American shall stay with me for three days. I do not break my word, even when it is *not* paid for."

The Frenchman sniffed, and there was insult in the action, at which Mohamed Ali's eyes narrowed, but de Beaumont did not voice his doubts.

"That is well then," he said at last. "And remember! No trickery. Now I go."

He touched his horse with spurred heel and dashed away.

Mohamed Ali turned upon Travers, whose fit of hysteria had passed, and who now stood thinking somewhat amazedly of the peculiar results his gibing had had upon the Frenchman. Mohamed Ali looked at him sternly and spoke enigmatically.

" 'The foot of a mule,' " he quoted, " 'may break a costly mirror.' "

He turned and went into his house, while Travers, a little alarmed at the thing that had shaken him, returned thoughtfully to his own domicile.

HE FOUND the servant boy just returning to its place the mattress which he had had out for a beating in the air, and as he greeted him, the thought came of another native youth, Larbi. Larbi had not ridden away with the Frenchman, wherefore he was probably still in the village.

"Look you," said Travers, addressing the servant. "Is the boy called Larbi still here, or has he been released?"

"He is still here. He is a very bad boy. *Mushi m'zien bizef!*"

"So?" answered Travers. "How is he worse than most?"

"He killed a man. An old man in Fez. It was very bad. The old man could not protect himself at all, and Larbi desired money. So he killed him by beating him on the head with a club. Therefore the Basha of Fez greatly desires Larbi's head to put upon the city gate, for the old man was a friend of his. And he was also a friend of Mohamed Ali," he added as an afterthought.

"Then no doubt Sid Mohamed will send him to the basha," offered Travers.

The servant shook his head.

"No; my master will not send him to Fez. At least, not all of him. His head, yes. He will shoot Larbi this afternoon, I think; the boy has confessed his crime. Then he will send the head to the basha. That is a much safer way, for heads do not run away."

"But look here," said Travers. "I want to talk with that boy before Mohamed Ali kills him."

"Why do you not ask Sid Mohamed for permission then?" asked the servant.

"Correct," agreed Travers. "That I will do," and he started off, briskly enough, although his mind entertained some doubts as to the reception which awaited him from the apparently disgruntled outlaw.

He found Mohamed Ali squatting on cushions in the shade of an olive tree by his house. The outlaw looked up as he approached, and a flicker of a smile appeared upon his face. Apparently he had been thinking, and his thoughts had led him to a better humor. Any man, he had reflected, has a breaking point, and he did not hesitate to give Travers credit for having taken considerable punishment.

"The servant boy tells me," said the American, "that you intend to execute Larbi this afternoon."

The outlaw's head nodded confirmation of the death sentence.

"You do not object?" he asked, although the tone was not malicious.

"Not in the least." Travers meant it. "But before you render him speechless I should like to talk with him. Is it permitted?"

Mohamed Ali considered him a moment in silence.

"You desire to ask him questions?"

"I do," concurred Travers. "A number of questions. I desire to ascertain who employed him to try to kill me, for one thing."

"I can tell you that," said Mohamed Ali, smiling faintly.

"I have no doubt," Travers shot back at

him. "Nevertheless, I desire to hear it from Larbi's lips. Providing, of course—" he hesitated a little—"providing, of course, you have no objections."

There was that in his tone, more than in the words, which caused Mohamed Ali to grin broadly.

"*Allah kerim!*" he exclaimed. "Talk to him to your heart's content. In fact if you have not time enough before sunset, I will defer his execution until a later hour. 'The desire of the guest is the duty of the host,' " he quoted. "But do you think—" he fired the question swiftly at Travers—"do you think that if I had anything to do with that matter Larbi would still be alive?"

Travers bit his lips in chagrin, but returned directness for directness.

"No," he said; "that is another reason why I asked permission to speak with him."

"And you think he will tell you what you desire to know?" asked the outlaw, dismissing the other line of thought.

"I do not know," answered Travers. "Of course, there are methods of making one talk."

"*I* am his executor," Mohamed Ali pointed out gruffly. "Talk to him if you wish—but do not harm him. You will find him in that hut there."

He pointed and smiled grimly as Travers, with a nod of acquiescence, strode off.

But if Travers entered the presence of Larbi with the hope that he would learn anything from that source, he was disappointed; in fact, the result of his examination served only to convince him that Mohamed Ali had threatened the boy with a more horrible death than shooting if he talked. At first Travers thought that he had gained his point, for the youth admitted that he had secured service with him with evil intention, and that he had exchanged the cigarets, but there all information stopped. Those who were behind him remained invisible. Every trick of cross-examination that Travers could think of, brought forth either utter silence or a brief, "I will not tell."

Even when Travers charged the boy point blank with having been employed by Mohamed Ali and Hadj Hamed to substitute the poisoned cigarets the boy did not endeavor to defend his countrymen by admitting what Travers had suspected—that de Beaumont had laid the plot, employing Larbi to carry it out. As a result, Travers was more in the dark than ever.

He argued that inasmuch as the boy was to die shortly he would have no cause for fear of any one save Mohamed Ali; that if the Frenchman had been guilty the boy might have admitted it without increasing his own danger in the least, and at the same time have disproved Travers' charge against Mohamed Ali and Hadj Hamed. That the boy did not do so weakened the suspicions against the Frenchman and increased that against the outlaw. And with this Travers had to be satisfied—although he was not.

Mohamed Ali, meeting him a little later, laughed at his disgusted answer to an inquiry concerning the results of the examination. And then, taking him by the sleeve, Mohamed Ali led him outside the village and toward a little clump of olive trees, where Travers saw a group had gathered. As they approached, they saw the flash of light on metal and saw that some of the men carried rifles.

Reaching the spot, he beheld Larbi standing against a tree, a single length of rope around his waist and around the tree trunk. Mohamed Ali gave a command, the spectators fell back, and three riflemen took position. Travers, although not long before he had expressed unconcern at the approaching execution, now felt more than a little sick; the abstract in such a matter is always so different from the concrete. He turned to Mohamed Ali.

"Must he die? He is very young," he offered.

"It is so written," answered the outlaw. "The evil he has wrought is already that of a grown man. And the ancient whom he killed was my friend."

Travers saw no sympathy, no softening, in the brown eyes. Mohamed Ali lifted his hand, and the rifles raised with the motion. And while they covered the heart of the youth against the tree, Mohamed Ali addressed the American.

"Do you wish to ask him your question again?" he inquired. "I will command him to speak."

Travers considered swiftly. Would the boy tell the truth, or would the presumed threat of torture by Mohamed Ali force him to lie even on the threshold of death? If the latter, Travers for some reason which he did not pause to analyze did not want the boy to die with a lie upon his lips.

Should he question him? On the other hand—perhaps he would not lie. If he did not he must incriminate either Mohamed Ali or some one else. Would the truth be known even after he had spoken?

"Answer quickly," Mohamed Ali's voice commanded him.

"Let him speak," said Travers.

The outlaw faced the boy.

"I command you to answer truthfully before you die, the question which the American now asks you. Will you do so?"

The boy looked from Mohamed Ali to Travers and from Travers to the still leveled rifles, and suddenly he seemed to be aware for the first time of the end which awaited him—to realize that, facing the rifles, he would perhaps perceive a flash of fire and a gray smoke before a great crash of darkness should rise and obliterate him. He swallowed once, and his voice came almost in a whisper.

"I will answer."

Travers stepped forward with his question.

"Who gave you the poisoned cigarets for me?" he asked.

The boy looked at him with misery-stricken eyes, tried to form a name with his lips and failed. Then, mastering himself with an effort, his eyes fastened as if hypnotized upon the upheld hand of Mohamed Ali, he said, loud enough so that all might hear—

"De Beaumont."

"And the German button?" questioned Travers.

"De Beaumont," repeated Larbi.

Travers nodded and turned away.

Mohamed Ali's hand fell. The rifles crashed, and Larbi fell forward upon the rope which held him.

XVIII

TRAVERS had finished his evening meal—eating only a little, and that with an effort—the picture of the boy Larbi hanging limp across the rope which held him persisting in forming itself before his eyes—when Mohamed Ali entered. The American looked up questioningly, but did not speak. Larbi with his last earthly utterance had assigned the guilt for one attempt upon Travers' life to de Beaumont and had exonerated Mohamed Ali and his friends from the odium of attempted poisoning; nevertheless, this was by no means the most important part of the problem, and the American was now thoroughly convinced that Mohamed Ali, whatever purposes might actuate him, was following a course which forced him to be considered not only an enemy, but the most important of all. Consequently he offered no greeting and no welcome to his captor, who stood looking at him in silence for a little while, a thoughtful smile upon his lips. At last Mohamed Ali spoke.

"You have thoroughly decided then," he said quietly, "that you will never forgive Mohamed Ali for what he has done to you; and that if Allah grants you a long enough life you will see what may be done to balance the account?"

"You are a reader of minds," retorted Travers.

Anger seized and shook him.

"A better reader of minds even than the Master of the *Djinnoon*," he added.

"Hmph!" Mohamed Ali grunted. "You know the Master of the *Djinnoon* then?"

Travers nodded.

"He was kind enough to warn me against you."

The outlaw chieftain arched his eyebrows.

"So? He warned you against me?"

"Judging from recent activities," answered Travers, "it must have been you. He warned me against certain enemies."

Mohamed Ali's face regained its placidity.

"I perceive," he commented. "And also you told him certain things, did you not?"

"I have forgotten," lied the American.

It was none of Mohamed Ali's business what he had told the Black Magician.

"Ah, you have forgotten so soon?" asked Mohamed Ali. "Your friendship for Morocco, of which you told him—it was so slight a thing—that already you have forgotten it?" He shrugged his big shoulders. "However—that is the way of the *Nasrini;* but what can one expect of a Christian?"

Travers leaped to his feet, his eyes blazing.

"You—Mohamed Ali——"

His voice trembled with anger, and his hands were clenched.

"You are a fine person to speak of love of country!" he cried. "You, who have sold it to the German and to the Frenchman, for a little gold! You, who have betrayed me, its friend, and turned the dogs loose upon it. Such words come well from you."

The big man took both the angry scowl and the angrier words without flinching. Only his eyebrows raised again, giving a supercilious expression to his face. Steadily he returned the look of the American, and when Travers had done speaking he said:

"I did not suppose that the concession meant so much to you."

"The concession!" cried Travers. "It means nothing to me—compared with what it means to Morocco. I told the Black Magician that I did not care—" He bit the words off. "It was Morocco I was thinking of; but—" His anger died and he shrugged his shoulders wearily. "With such as you plotting against it, the country is doomed."

"Perhaps," answered Mohamed Ali slowly. "Perhaps what you say is true."

He gazed a moment in silence at the back which Travers had turned upon him. "And yet—" With a grimace he switched to another matter.

"However—" and his voice was metallic—"I came not to discuss matters with you, but to give you certain orders."

"And if I should not choose to obey them?" questioned Travers.

"Then fortunately," Mohamed Ali answered him, "I am in a position to enforce them."

"No doubt," agreed Travers. "What are they?"

"Tonight—within an hour—you ride—with a kinsman of mine, Aïsa the One-Eyed, so-called because he is blind of one eye. He is——"

"And whither?" Travers interrupted him with the question.

"You travel as his captive—and it is sufficient that he knows your destination."

"And we do not have the honor of your company?"

Mohamed Ali ignored the sarcasm.

"I have said that you go with Aïsa the One-Eyed," he answered quietly.

"And meanwhile you jingle the gold that Feldmann and de Beaumont paid you on your word of honor—" his voice was cold—"that I should remain with you for three days. Truly it is said that the value of a man's honor is what one must pay for it."

Mohamed Ali took the thrust in silence.

"In an hour Aïsa will be ready. Be you also prepared."

"I am ready now," answered Travers. "What have I to do to prepare?"

"Nothing perhaps," retorted Mohamed Ali, showing his claws for the first time, "except perhaps your mind. And another thing," he continued. "It will be a silent ride. My cousin Aïsa is a most devout man. For some error which he has committed—a little thing, I think, but it seems large to him—he has taken the vow of silence for some days. Therefore conversation will be limited. But I may add that although Aïsa is a holy man and a beggar by profession, he is very strong. Besides which, you will be bound. That, I think, is all. In an hour then."

Travers, with eyelids narrowed over fierce eyes, watched the big man make his exit. After a little he mastered his anger and tried to find a spot of light in the situation. Where was he to be taken? And why? Where and why? Where and why? The unspoken words repeated themselves like echoes in his ears. Where and why?

Abruptly from his unconsciousness sprang a suggestion. He could not explain what had mothered it, as is the case so often with the thoughts which come seemingly of their own volition, created out of nothingness. The German had been set free, and the Frenchman also had been given his liberty. Behind both of these stood great European powers—powers ready and willing—powers who desired, in fact, only an opportunity to grasp their iron hands about the throat of Morocco.

In seizing these men Mohamed Ali had exposed his country to invasion, had moved pawns upon the chessboard of European war plans. But he had set them free and had thereby made it improbable—most improbable—that serious results would follow. Perhaps after all Mohamed Ali was enough of a patriot not to cut his country's throat by holding the Europeans captive. No doubt he had made with them such arrangements as one unscrupulous man might make with another.

But as it concerned himself, Travers, an American—the case was different. What had happened in the affair of the other American captive of Mohamed Ali would be repeated—and nothing more. Mohamed Ali would demand an immense ransom from the Sultan; the Sultan would refuse to grant the demand. The United States would peremptorily order his

Majesty to pay the ransom—and the Sultan would bow to the inevitable. Was that Mohamed Ali's game? Assuredly, thought Travers, there was every indication that it was.

The by-play with the Frenchman and the German no doubt was only to give the outlaw some immediate funds; nothing more nor less than highway robbery, in fact. Or perhaps the outlaw actually had captured them as part of a greater plan which, after consideraion, the had given up as being too difficult to carry out.

And now Travers was facing a journey, he knew not whither, in company with a one-eyed beggar who had taken the vow of silence. Perhaps to some concealed fortress of Mohamed Ali, inaccessible or impregnable to the attack of the Sultan's forces when the demand for ransom should be made. Some strong *casbah* hidden among the foot-hills of the Atlas, where Mohamed Ali himself eventually would come to thumb his nose at the efforts of the Sultan to release the captive, and to wait with the patience of a spider in its web for that word from his Majesty which should show that he was carrying out the orders of the United States of America.

* * *

ANALYZING the situation, the time sped swiftly for Travers. There was the sound of a horse being led to the doorway of his hut. A soldier entered, carrying a pair of European handcuffs and a *djellaba* of coarse brown weave. Travers jumped to his feet and clenched his fists, swept by a hot desire to fight, to inflict pain even upon this soldier of Mohamed Ali, who was only carrying out orders which he dared not disobey. But abruptly the futility of resistance followed the heat of passion like cold water upon a fire, and with a shrug he held out his hands.

"This first," said the soldier.

He took the *djellaba* from beneath his arm. As it unrolled a red fez fell from its folds. Travers donned the garment, which fell from his shoulders to his heels, put on the pointed crimson fez with its blue tassel, and pulled the *koob*, or hood, of the *djellaba* up over it. Then again he held out his hands, and the soldier snapped the manacles in place.

"Come," he said, and helped Travers to mount his horse.

Immediately the American was joined by another horseman, who rode up out of the darkness—a horseman who, Travers observed in the light from the doorway, wore a dark tattered *djellaba*, the *koob* of which draped his head; the face was half-covered by a dirty gray bandage, which ran diagonally, hiding one eye, and a voluminous cloth, equally dirty, wrapped about his neck, came up to his chin. That part of his face which was visible was covered by a stubby, ill-kept beard, a dark smear across one side of his nose and cheek seemed to indicate a skin disease which is quite prevalent among Moorish beggars. The eyebrow visible above the single eye was a dirty gray, and there were spots of the same faded color in the black beard.

"Hmph!" grunted Travers, looking at the figure of the beggar. "If that's Mohamed Ali's cousin, I think he is not much for Mohamed Ali to be proud of."

He made the comment in Arabic, and his words were audible. The soldier raised a hand swiftly to his face to cover a quickly suppressed grin. He handed the beggar an automatic pistol, which the latter concealed among his draperies, struck his horse's flanks with the square corners of his huge metal stirrups and rode off with a movement of the head which indicated that Travers was to follow. Travers' hands were free enough so that he had no difficulty in managing the reins. He pulled his horse around; the soldier whacked the animal upon the rump with a broad palm; and holy man and American passed through the starlight toward the village gate.

Their horses picked their way cautiously down the hillside. At the foot of the hill they turned, and Travers, consulting the stars, knew that they traveled south. Aïsa the One Eyed rode swiftly, and Travers' horse followed closely behind. Both mounts were excellent, and Travers, despite a mental depression, thrilled with the feeling that comes to all good horsemen when they feel the swift play of the muscles of a fine horse beneath them.

His saddle, he had been glad to observe, was of European style—not one of the huge padded native saddles such as Aïsa the One-Eyed rode, but probably one of English make. He was thankful for this, as much as he could be thankful for anything for the moment, because one whose muscles are unaccustomed to the native saddles quickly grow tired and sore from them.

They rode almost directly southward, Travers judged. Perhaps a little to the west. This, he knew, would take them on a course which ran almost parallel to the road between El K'sar and Tangier, but would take them past El K'sar—if they went that far—some miles to the east.

The course they were taking could mean but one thing, he argued; they were skirting the foot of the hills until they should come to the trail or the valley which should turn them eastward again into the wilderness of the higher hills. That Mohamed Ali had many a hiding place in that wilderness Travers had no doubt; in fact he had heard tales concerning a *cashbah* of the outlaw some twenty miles almost due east of the town of El K'sar. This, he argued, was probably their destination—a long, hard ride through the rocky hills cut by cañons and ravines; a safe hiding place for any one.

Another thought sprang from this one. Perhaps, despite his manacled hands, he could find opportunity, in the rough country through which they must pass, to escape Aïsa the One-Eyed and his automatic. He was aware that an attempt as they now rode would be folly; the beggar's horse was probably better than his own, and he had little doubt that if it were not, Aïsa would end the race by a bullet, either for himself or his horse.

Wherefore, Travers decided, waiting was in order, waiting until they turned into the hills east of El K'sar. Then he would make his attempt. Perhaps he could manage to dismount from his horse without causing the animal to stop, thus drawing the attention of his captor. Then he could slip into hiding in the darkness of some ravine or bouldered hillside, and there would be little chance of a man finding him, even though the searchers had two eyes instead of but one. Even should he have to stop his horse and thus attract the attention of the One-Eyed, if he chose his spot properly he could be safe from bullets behind rock or boulder, and thereafter in the blackness of some valley. Assuredly his captor must also be his guide through the hills, and therefore must keep ahead of him.

The miles passed, and the hours, and at last, swinging over a little rise, Travers was surprized to see ahead of them and to their right, a few yellow lights and the black bulk of a high-walled town. This was strange, he thought. Most strange. For he knew that the only town that this could be was El K'sar Kebir, the Great Castle, so called by the natives of old, who had somewhat childish ideas of fortifications.

He had not expected that his guide would lead them so close to this town, which now the Sultan honored by his royal presence, and which would naturally be teeming with officials and soldiers and camp followers. In fact, he could see upon the plain beyond the city, a blur of white, which he knew must be the tents of the military force accompanying the sovereign. No doubt Aïsa would now strike eastward into the hills, taking no chance of running into a wandering soldier.

Travers wondered what time it was, and managed with some difficulty to extract his watch from his pocket. He discovered that it was nearly eleven o'clock. They had ridden for about three hours. As he returned the watch to his pocket it occurred to him that perhaps now would be the opportune moment to make a break for liberty—a race across the few miles of plains to the town might be won, with luck, against horse or bullet. Would Aïsa take the chance of shooting and perhaps bringing forth a mounted guard to investigate? If he could reach the town he would be safe.

But even as the thought—and it had been but a few seconds since he had first observed the lights of El K'sar—Aïsa the One-Eyed turned and rode back toward him, and Travers saw the glitter of starlight upon the automatic in his hand. Without an audible expression Aïsa motioned eastward toward the hills, then took up position beside and slightly back of Travers, their horses touching.

Travers felt the nose of the automatic pressing against his ribs. His horse, apparently of its own accord, turned toward the hills, following up a little valley where great boulders, as big as tents, lay scattered.

They went thus perhaps a quarter of a mile. Then Aïsa, drawing ahead, seized the bridle of Travers' horse and pulled it and his own to a stop. He dismounted and motioned to Travers to do the same. The American obeyed and also obeyed him when the beggar motioned for him to lead his horse into a little enclosure formed by a rough circle of boulders.

There Aïsa, holding the reins of his mount, squatted down with his back against a rock. His purpose was not clear to Travers, but he too found a seat; apparently the old beggar desired to rest a little although Travers felt that in his place he would be getting away quickly from the proximity of El K'sar.

The American lighted a cigaret, leaned back against a rock and gazed up at the stars, which hung low, seeming like lanterns but a little distance away. The great boulders, like white tents, dotted the sleeping valley. He could imagine the bivouac of an army. A sense of peace stole upon him; it seemed incredible that the past week of danger and turmoil, of murderous plots, concealed intrigue and hidden menace, had been real.

He looked upon the bowed head of the mendicant, Aïsa. The one eye was closed as if in sleep. Was it credible that he, Travers, an American, sat in a star-lit valley among the Atlas foothills, the captive of an aged, diseased and one-eyed begging holy man? He raised his hand to return the cigaret to his lips, and the thin clink of a steel chain reminded him pointedly that it was not only credible, but true. Weariness stole over him, and he lay his head back against the rock and closed his eyes. His thoughts wandered, faded.

He awoke with a start, groping blankly for a little before he remembered. He looked at Aïsa the One-Eyed and saw that his head was bowed forward upon his knees. He noted that the breathing was slow and regular as of a sleeping man. He rose slowly to his feet, his eyes upon the beggar. Perhaps— But as he straightened, Aïsa raised his head, glanced casually at him and yawned. Travers saw the gleam of the automatic in his lap.

Now Aïsa also rose and approached the American. He took from his *shakarah* a piece of white turban cloth, twisted it into a soft rope, and before Travers was quite aware of his intention, whipped it around the head of the American, who opened his mouth to speak and found the turban cloth between his jaws.

Aïsa knotted the rope quickly at the back of his captive's neck and then motioned to him to mount. With an unvoiced curse Travers obeyed. He could reach the twisted cloth with his hands, but he could not stretch it sufficiently to get it over his lower jaw. Perhaps, he thought, he could chew it through. The reason for the gag, however, he did not understand—until Aïsa seized the bridle reins from his hands and started off across the plains directly for the town of El K'sar!

Travers was amazed, and more. All his wise deductions had been dismissed by a single gesture—a dozen paces of a horse across the star-lit plains of El K'sar.

XIX

THIS Majesty the Sultan of Morocco, Prince of Islám, Commander of the Faithful, wrapped in a voluminous white *k'sa*, sat in crosslegged dignity, somewhat like a statue of Buddha, upon a red plush divan of manifestly European make. The divan occupied almost entirely one end of the long room which the Basha of El K'sar, dark-faced, black-bearded, ferocious Belghazi, used as his own official reception hall and place of justice.

Now it had gained a dignity from which it would never be dissociated; it held the sacred person of the sovereign of El Moghreb al-Acksa, descendant of the Prophet and earthly representative of Islám's God—a youthful Sultan, not long out of his teens, who found but little peace of mind in his august position. One of the few remaining autocrats of earth, he looked more like a bored, unhealthy youth than one who had been chosen by a dying father to govern an ungovernable people.

The voluminous, graceful folds of the immaculate *k'sa* concealed his figure, but it did not conceal a pale face outlined by a sparse black beard which ran down the side and beneath his chin, a touch of black mustache upon his upper lip, nor large, dark brown eyes almost black, below dark eyebrows. The forehead was high, cut off by a streak of crimson fez beneath a small white turban, giving, with the expressive eyes, an air of superior intelligence to the face—but a keen observer must have taken into consideration also the languorous eyelids fringed with their long, feminine lashes, the sensuous thickness of the lips, and the tired, strained look about the eyes. Two soft, white hands lay listlessly in his lap, unmarked by any jewel of royalty.

His Majesty was dressed as simply and inexpensively as, perhaps more than, the most ordinary courtier, although it must be said that his lack of jewels resulted from the Koranic prohibition against them, and that his simplicity of dress was the result of caution. The Sultans of Morocco do not make themselves conspicuous marks for knife or bullet.

Behind the sovereign's divan hung a magnificent *haiti*, or paneled wall covering; a priceless and ancient Rabat carpet stretched before him, and along its edges stood a score of dignitaries of the realm. And at either end of the divan stood a huge black Sudanese, almost nude, carrying an unsheathed simitar.

There was absolute silence in the big room, save for the deep breathing of those who awaited his Majesty's pleasure. And almost no motion. The native dignitaries stood like white shrouded ghosts along the walls, watching their sovereign or each other, or gazing at the intricate design in the carpet. Here and there among them stood men whose dress did not consist of the stately white *k'sa*, but instead of velvet suits of many colors, the jackets lavishly embroidered with silk and silver and gold, a white *sulham* falling over all on one side and on the other thrown back over their shoulders—a token of allegiance to their master, which has grown out of the precaution to make sure that no weapon is hidden beneath the enshrouding mantle.

Those individuals who were in simple white *k'sas* were the Sultan's chief advisers, his Viziers and great officials; the others were lesser nobles, whose ranks were high, but who still were not permitted to enter the presence without making this reassuring sign of loyalty. Even though they made it, the unfortunate monarch, in the years to come, was to discover that there are weapons more fatal than those which may be concealed beneath a *sulham*

The Sultan gave a signal with a listless hand, and his voice, too, was listless when he commanded—

"Permit them to enter."

It was the time, just before midday, set by his Majesty for the submission of the offers for the mining concession in Zemmur Province—so nearly midday that those of thoughtful mind knew that the proceedings would be swift in order that they might be completed before the time for the midday prayer.

A little sound rustled along the sides of the room as his Majesty's chamberlain threw open the door at the far end of the chamber and motioned to two men to enter.

Through the doorway, side by side, came Herr Feldmann, stolid of face and in European garments, without the native *sulham* he usually affected, and de Beaumont, taller, better groomed and with a faint smile upon his handsome face. At the threshold they stopped and bowed low. Another three paces they took and bowed again.

Then they stepped forward until they had reached the spot which the design of the carpet showed them was the center of the floor and made their third deep obeisance to the pallid-faced youth upon the divan, a youth who proceeded to gaze with expressionless features upon them as if he wondered what they might be doing there; who gazed until the German lost something of his stolidity and drew a nervous hand across his forehead; until de Beaumont fumbled with a button on his coat.

No greetings came from the lips of the Sultan, as they should have come, no softening of his face in welcome. The contrary, in fact. The royal eyelids sank slightly farther over the royal eyes; on either side of the royal jaw a little muscle bulged, and the royal lips were not so thick.

For a little space longer he looked in silence upon the two *Nasrini* waiting humbly before him. Then he added a further insult. A glance drew his chamberlain to a kneeling posture at his feet.

"Ask the *Nasrini*," commanded his Majesty, "what they desire of us."

To the face of the German the Sultan's command brought a scowl of anger, and to the Frenchman a flush of rage. Not for generations had it been the custom for the Sultan to speak to Europeans through a servant—and through an interpreter only when the Europeans spoke no language with which the Sultan was familiar. That the present sovereign knew both French and German, both Frenchman and German knew; besides which, he knew that they both spoke Arabic.

It was a deliberate affront, and into the minds of both plotters there came a most uneasy feeling. This was no way for his Majesty to receive the representatives of powerful European interests, interests which, they were well aware, could cause his throne to totter, perhaps to fall. Why then did he dare to do it? What knowledge did he have which made him strong and thus contemptuous alike of the French tricolor and the German eagles?

"His Majesty—whom God protect—demands to know your business with him." The deep voice of the chamberlain broke in upon their thoughts.

De Beaumont looked at Feldmann, and Feldmann looked at de Beaumont.

"Let the German speak first," commanded the Sultan to the chamberlain.

"We come, your Majesty—" the German corrected himself—"I come, your Majesty, to submit my offer for the mining rights in the Province of Zemmur."

The German's voice was jerky. There was a note in it which rendered it somewhat harsh for the ears of a reigning prince. It seemed to jar upon that Sultan's ear, for he frowned slightly as he nodded. The chamberlain signaled de Beaumont with his eyes.

"And I, your Majesty," said the Frenchman, "come for the same purpose."

He had noted the tone of the German's voice and the resultant frown, and by an effort forced his own tones to be properly smooth and humble. Whatever knowledge the Sultan might possess, manifestly was enough; it behooved de Beaumont not to add even an irrigating inflection to things he already feared but did not understand.

"Receive their offers," commanded the Prince of Islám negligently.

The chamberlain approached the Europeans and extended his hand. They drew long envelops from their pockets and presented them. Then surprizingly the Sultan, drawing himself more erect, all the listlessness gone from voice and manner, spoke directly at the pair.

"There was to have been another offer," he said. "Where is the American?"

Taken by surprize, de Beaumont started to look at Feldmann, but checked himself.

"Speak, Frenchman," commanded the Sultan.

A little hum of throat-clearing and the whisper of moving garments swept along the walls.

"I do not know, your Majesty," answered de Beaumont. "I could scarcely be expected to know."

The Sultan pulled his eyes from the face of de Beaumont to the face of the German.

"And you?" he demanded, a sneer in his voice.

"Nor I, your Majesty," returned the German. "How should I know of his movements? He should be here now."

The Sultan smiled grimly and nodded portentously.

"That is true," he said. "He should be here now. And so—" he paused a moment, then continued—"and so neither the one nor the other of you knows anything about him."

Two Christian heads shook in agreement. The monarch turned again to the waiting chamberlain.

"Bring you here the two others whom we have ordered you to hold in readiness."

The chamberlain strode again to the doorway and called. In immediate answer came the tramp of slippered feet, the clatter of arms, a halt—and two natives, their wrists fastened with chains, left their guards behind them and, preceded by the chamberlain, entered the Presence.

DE BEAUMONT and Feldmann looked at each other and stared. They controlled themselves with an effort—but a greater effort still was needed when they saw passing them the two native members of the Concessions Committee whom they had so thoroughly bribed and mastered in Tangier.

Fortunately they had a few moments to gain control of themselves; to plan swiftly what might now be done. That the committee had been dismissed by the Sultan they knew, of course; but that these two members were here in El K'sar and in chains came as a surprize to them; not often did officials who merely accepted bribes thus pay for what they received. The two men in chains passed them, approaching the royal divan, and flung themselves with foreheads to the floor before his Majesty.

"Rise," commanded the sovereign, and they obeyed. "You ibn Suliman," ordered the Sultan, looking sternly at one of the cowering creatures, "repeat that which you have already told to us concerning this Frenchman."

Stammering, swallowing, with difficulty, the wretched man, remembering a most painful beating and anticipating a still more unpleasant punishment, spoke, and his words told truly of his purchase by de Beaumont. Through the recital the Sultan listened without change of expression, and when he had finished, raised a hand in command to the other fellow. And then the royal ears, and many ears not royal, listened to the tale of the German's operations—not only concerning the gold which had changed hands, but of things more evil still.

When the second man had finished and stood with ashmed and fearfully bowed head before his Majesty, waiting, the Sultan spoke again, this time to the Europeans, looking from one to the other with angry eyes.

"These words are lies, no doubt?"

The German was first to regain his composure; perhaps his more stolid nature had been less shaken by this unexpected event. He bowed slightly, and his bow was an assent, as was also his reply.

"Untruths, your Majesty. Untruths from start to finish."

Thus he made his play, perhaps unwittingly, perhaps not, forcing de Beaumont to follow his lead. The Frenchman bit his lip in chagrin; he had had another lie; a better one, he thought, had occurred to him, but it was useless now.

"And I also, your Majesty, say these things are untrue." He bowed.

Then from the lips of the Commander of the Faithful came sharp, angry laughter, abruptly bitten off.

"Remove them," he commanded his chamberlain, motioning toward the two former members of the committee.

Then he turned his eyes again upon the Europeans.

"More truth may be gained from a little whip," he said, "than from the lips of the *Nasrini*. Possessing the truth already, we needed no more from you. And now concerning the American again. You know nothing of him?"

Anger and fear seized the two Europeans and fought within them; anger that the lie should thus be thrown in their teeth; fear, not that they would be punished for their lie, nor for their suborning of the committee members—for they knew that as nationals of European powers they could not be punished for those—but for fear that they would be goaded into offering an insult to the monarch, which would bring swift death to them at the hands of his officials, with twoscore witnesses that they had brought their deaths upon themselves.

That they were in a most dangerous position both realized thoroughly; a single misstep, brought about by anger or confusion, might be seized upon—would be seized upon, they felt—by this angry monarch who for once had outplayed his enemies and then had unexpectedly taken matters into his own hands, despite his reputed weakness, despite the circle of European and native influences which usually held him in check. There was only one answer possible to his question.

"I do not know, your Majesty," repeated de Beaumont.

"Nor I, your Majesty," echoed the German.

Then the monarch's eyes again summoned to his feet the chamberlain, and to him he gave an order inaudible to the Europeans. The chamberlain, rising and making obeisance for the third time, went to the doorway and returned followed by a brown-skinned native wearing the coarse brown *djellaba* of the countryman. Their footfalls as they approached were silenced by the heavy carpet, and the man passed the Europeans and threw himself before his sovereign before they knew of his presence or could see his face.

"Rise," commanded his Majesty, "and look upon these two *Nasrini*."

The countryman rose and faced about slowly. From the German came a smothered grunt, from the Frenchman a half-suppressed curse, and from the Sultan, who, watching and listening, had heard both and had noted the consternation which had swept their faces, a vicious smile.

"You know them?" The royal question was addressed to the countryman.

"I know them, my master," he replied, facing the Sultan and bowing as he spoke.

"Tell us then of your business with them. And as you desire life, speak the truth—which is already known to us."

A rustle of excitement swept among the spectators and along the walls—little mutters and whispers.

"This man," said the brown-*djellaba*-ed native, pointing an accusing finger at the German, "arranged with my then master, Wahda the black, that the American should be seized on his way through Anghera with Achmido ibn Dress, his friend, and held prisoner until after the awarding of the mining concession. Preparations were made for this to be done. But before it had bee accomplished, there came to my master this other *Nasrini*."

The brown arm described an arc until it pointed at de Beaumont. Feldmann turned his head and gazed steadily for a moment at de Beaumont's profile. Beneath his breath he uttered a word which reached the ear of the Frenchman and which caused his hands and jaws to clench.

"He, the Frenchman," continued the native, "did not desire to interfere with the German's plans, only to add to them. He paid my master gold, for which the American, after having been seized and carried into the hills as the German had instructed, was to be killed. His body was to be consumed in the charcoal kilns. I——"

The native turned again to face his sovereign.

"I, my master," he continued, "was not unwilling to share in the seizing of the *Nasrini's* person, but—as I have said to your Majesty before—I did not wish to have a hand in his death. Then came a message to our leader which caused him not to kill the American, who was then imprisoned. But that very night the village was raided and he was carried off. I have not seen him since."

"And from whom," inquired the Sultan, "did the message come which prevented his death?"

In lowered voice the man replied, awe in his tones. De Beaumont and Feldmann strained their ears for the answer.

"The order," said the native, "was from the Hand of Allah."

De Beaumont and Feldmann showed their quick amazement, and the Sultan gazed at them maliciously. To them "the Hand of Allah" was only a name—but a name which carried with it awe of the unknown. A symbol not only of a man whose identity was a secret, but of a hidden force which was felt through all Islám. Why, they wondered, had the Hand of Allah thus interfered to save the American? That this power was able to do so, and that it knew all things, they were aware—but its sudden interference puzzled them, despite their other emotions.

"And," continued the Sultan, "by whom was the village raided and the American taken captive again?"

This time there was no awe but a great respect in the native's voice when he made answer.

"Mohamed Ali."

"Enough," commanded the Sultan. "Go."

And after the native withdrew the royal face was turned again to look upon the Europeans. He asked neither confirmation nor denial from them. Merely he smiled. And in that smile was all the contempt that a king may have for a slave.

"Their bids," he said to his chamberlain. "Give us their bids."

The chamberlain deferentially handed him the two long envelops.

"We are about to exercise the prerogative of our office," said the young monarch. "We called for offers for the mining rights in the Province of Zemmur. We now exercise our right to cancel our former order and to issue another in its place. Offers will be received—but—not—" his white fingers tore in half the two long envelops and tore the halves in two again—"but not from such dogs as these."

He cast the little squares of paper contemptuously upon the carpet before him, and a gasp of surprize and satisfaction circled the room.

"Take them from our presence. They are an offense to our eyes."

But as the big officer stepped toward the purple-faced German and the Frenchman who stood biting his lips and clenching and unclenching his hands in anger, an interruption occurred.

Through the doorway passed a figure, and stopped and bowed; strode forward again and met the eyes of his Majesty. A titter ran up and down the walls and from the lips of the chamberlain, who had started rapidly toward the intruder, and then had stopped abruptly, turning to face his sovereign.

"It is the American, your Majesty."

AND now the face of the young Sultan cleared. Lines of amusement crinkled about his lips and eyes, and in a hearty voice he commanded—

"Let him approach."

Travers came swiftly forward. He was unkempt and obviously tired, as if he had slept little and traveled far—as was the case. His eyes were red and his hair tousled.

"I must apologize, your Majesty," he said, "for my uncourtier-like appearance, but—am I in time to submit my offer?"

He flashed a quick look about him, observed the scowling figures of de Beaumont and Feldmann—and upon the floor about his feet, little squares of paper. His eyes sought the Sultan's. Toward the little squares of paper upon the carpet his Majesty waved a white hand.

"There," he said, "lie two of the offers—let us hope that yours will have a better fate."

He held out his hand, and into it Travers placed the sealed and somewhat crinkled envelope which he drew from his pocket.

"I feared I should be too late, your Majesty," he said. "I have had—" he smiled whimsically—"I have had some difficulties."

His smile was answered by another—not a royal smile at all, but the frank grin of an amused youth.

"Some words concerning these difficulties have reached our ears," he said. "But the Hand of Allah gains its purpose without regard to what may oppose."

He made a quick sign to the Chamberlain, and rose.

"We will give you audience today an hour before *El Moghreb*," said the Sultan to the American.

"But—the bid?" Travers questioned hesitatingly. "You have not seen it."

The Sultan shrugged his shoulders and grinned again.

"We award the concession to you," he said, and was gone.

"Sight unseen!" gasped Travers. "Now what do you think of that!"

He scratched his head, puzzled, and turned slowly until his absorbed gaze rested upon de Beaumont and Feldmann, who were being impolitely urged by the chamberlain to go away.

XX

THE copper sun hung like a round, bamboo-ribbed Japanese lantern above the horizon, casting shadows like gigantic fingers across the plains of El K'sar and seeming to color it once again with blood, as upon that olden day when the great Battle of the Three Kings was waged upon it.

Travers made his way through the streets of the city from the basha's mansion where he had had his audience with the Sultan toward the little, windowless house hidden away on an unpretentious street, where he thought to find Aïsa the One-Eyed awaiting him. In his mind thoughts tumbled about, one over the other, like children playing tag, especially that form of the game known as cross-tag, where pursuer and pursued change places every little while. Following one thought, he would abruptly find himself pursuing yet another. Much had been made clear to him, but far from all. Part of the web he could see, some he could guess at, and the rest was as yet completely hidden from his sight.

From some of those present at the Sultan's morning audience he had learned of the affairs which had taken place previous to his own arrival—of the confession of the two members of the Concessions Committee and their charges against de Beaumont and Feldmann; of the further revelations of the member of the gang who had been hired first by the German to abduct and hold him prisoner until it should be too late to submit his bid, later to be paid by de Beaumont to bring about his death and thus make doubly certain of his elimination.

The treatment of the Frenchman and the German by the Sultan had been apparent to him in the morning, and at the afternoon audience granted him by his Majesty he had learned yet more. The Sultan by affixing his signature had confirmed the concession to the American; the German and the Frenchman had been ordered to return to Tangier, discredited and disgraced, their missions failures. Travers knew well enough that although unquestionably they would make reports to their employers and to their Governments, no retaliatory move could be made by the latter, for the two stood convicted in the Sultan's audience of actual crime, the evidence against them heard by the highest in the land. As for himself—he thought with some chagrin of his efforts, his unavailing struggles, against the hidden web in which he had found himself enmeshed. A toy of Fate!

But although this much seemed clear there were other matters which were by no means so. He perceived something of the reasons for Mohamed Ali's operations. Some brief observations offered by the Sultan had aided him in this perception.

Undoubtedly Mohamed Ali, perhaps the instrument of some other force, had rescued him from his first captivity and had held him until matters could be arranged to bring about the downfall of de Beaumont and Feldmann. That he had been informed concerning the dishonesty of the two committee members the Sultan had admitted; also that he had been informed concerning the American. But when Travers had asked his Majesty for further explanations the Commander of the Faithful had only shaken his head and kept his lips closed.

Even when Travers, remembering the order which had saved his life in the little village when he stood before the leveled rifles of the black's gang, had asked him the meaning of the name "the Hand of Allah" the Sultan had maintained his silence; but Travers had guessed, more from what had not been said then from what had been, that the hidden force behind much that was yet unexplained was represented by this symbolical title.

Nor was it clear to the American why Mohamed Ali had held him in his village until the preceding night. The outlaw's release of the two Europeans he thought he understood—they had been held there until the word had come that the Sultan knew of their activities; until the way was prepared for their assured downfall. The demanding of a ransom from each by Mohamed Ali had been only a jest and a gibe by the whimsical-minded outlaw, tickled by the thought that they paid him to gain a freedom which would be useless to them, and paid him again to defeat the American who they thought had been the cause of their own captivity. Travers grinned as he walked, finding something amusing in it himself.

His thoughts turned to the one-eyed beggar, and he reviewed swiftly the incidents of the preceding night, from the moment he had found all his conclusions disrupted, all of his theories exploded when, instead of turning into the hills, they had headed across the great plains toward the sleeping city.

Reaching the blackness of the city wall, they had tied their horses to some bushes and had gone on foot to what Travers recognized as one of the lesser gates of the city. Aïsa the One-Eyed had pulled the hood of Travers' *djellaba* down over his face, and led him by the arm to the gate, where a guard had challenged them and a peculiar sign from Aïsa the One-Eyed had caused him to fall back and let them pass. This even though the Sultan himself slept in El K'sar!

Travers would have given much to know the meaning of the symbol of a right hand raised in a peculiar manner. He wondered whether it also signified "the Hand of Allah."

Quickly they had reached the little blind house in the dark and narrow street where a knock had gained them admission. In silence Aïsa had led him into a room, pointed to a mattress upon the floor and closed and locked the door behind him.

Upon that mattress he had thrown himself to sleep and had slept like a drugged person until a late hour in the morning. Then a silent servant entered and gave him food.

His watch told him that it was something after eleven o'clock—something after the hour set by the Sultan to receive the bids. Abandoning all hope now, and yet puzzled as to why he should have thus been brought a prisoner to El K'sar, he grimly watched his timepiece tick off the minutes.

Then came interruption. Again the servant entered and with a little key unlocked and removed the handcuffs fromTravers' wrists.

"My master commands that you go at once to the basha's mansion," he said.

Travers had stared at him in amazement. Was it another trick?

"But—I would see your master first," he had replied.

The servant shook his head as he answered:

"My master is not here. He will return at sunset, and requests that you meet him here at that hour."

"I am free to go then?" demanded Travers. "There are no tricks in this?"

The servant shrugged his shoulders.

"I know of no tricks. I have told you what my master told me to tell you. If I were you I should go hastily."

He cast a significant look at Travers' watch.

Amazed, wondering, as if he were acting in a dream, Travers made his way to the basha's mansion, remembering with a thrill of thankfulness that his written bid had never left the little leather case strapped about his waist. He was conscious of surprize that it had never been taken from him. Perhaps——

He was still turning these matters over in his mind on his way back from his interview with the Sultan.

Then the trail of recollection came to an abrupt end. Perhaps thirty or forty paces ahead of him he saw the shuffling figure of Aïsa the One-Eyed, and even as he caught sight of him de Beaumont and Feldmann swung around the corner of a building and almost ran into the American, All three stopped short, a single step separating them. Travers looked grimly from one to the other and was seized by a very great and very natural passion.

"You!" His voice snapped. "I haven't been looking for you, but I'm glad to see you. Want to say that I don't like your methods, although I've had to stand for them. Now—try—mine!"

His fist caught the German beneath the left ear in the folds of his neck, and with a grunt the friend of the All-Highest sprawled backward and lay quiet. Before he had struck the ground de Beaumont had reached swiftly toward his hip; but more swift than his was the hand of the American.

The Frenchman raised his left arm instinctively, but uselessly. Travers broke the guard with his own left arm, and a blow into which he put all of his strength and all of his heart caught the Frenchman on the point of his shapely jaw. Without a groan he measured his length beside that of Feldmann. The American, his fists upon his hips, stood and glared down at them.

"Get up! Get up!" a voice inside of him seemed to be crying. "Get up! And take the rest of it."

But neither moved to obey. Then the American became conscious that Aïsa the One-Eyed had approached. He heard a chuckle and looked into the single eye of the old beggar. What little of the face was visible was decorated by a grin, and the bandaged head beneath the *koob* seemed to nod approval.

Travers looked down again at the prostrate men. The German had opened his eyes, but did not move. De Beaumont, with a gasping breath, struggled and sat up. He did not speak, but looked at Travers with an unending enmity in his eyes. Travers did not need to be told that if they had been foes before, they were thrice enemies now. He looked at his right hand and grimaced.

"I am sorry now, I think, that I dirtied myself by touching such swine as you," he said, and passed on.

Then he heard a cry from Aïsa the One-Eyed: "*All'arbi! All'arbi*! Alms in the name of Allah the Compassionate," and turned to look back.

What he saw caused his eyes and mouth to open in amazement, and then made him shake with laughter. Aïsa the One-Eyed was presenting a begging bowl to the angry Europeans and asking them for alms in the name of Allah the Compassionate!

Still laughing, Travers continued his way to the house, knowing by the tap of the iron-tipped staff upon the cobbles behind him that the beggar followed. Shortly they squatted upon cushions within the house, and Travers told the mendicant of the day's affairs as they seemed to him. Aïsa spoke no word during the narrative, only nodded his old head now and then in answer or in approval.

"And so," concluded Travers, "although I know not the why of many of these things, the desired result has been brought about. But only," he added as an afterthought, "because Mohamed Ali failed to keep his word to de Beaumont and Feldmann. I mean his promise that I should remain with him for three days."

Unexpectedly another voice sounded, coming from the lips of Aïsa the One-Eyed.

"My period of silence is ended," said the beggar. "Mohamed Ali *did* keep his promise."

Travers was startled. Not only at the significance of the words, but at the change in the beggar's voice.

"He kept his promise? Assuredly if I am here and Mohamed Ali is in Anghera——"

He got no further. From the throat of Aïsa the One-Eyed roared the deep, unforgettable laughter. Travers stared aghast. And as he did so the beggar raised his hand and with a swift motion lifted the bandage from his eye and tore the rag from about his neck. There, despite certain unnatural details, sat Mohamed Ali, laughing at Travers' amazed face.

"A bandage, a neckcloth, a little red stain—" his hands touched the spot of apparent disease upon his face— "and a little wood ashes judiciously rubbed into beard and eyebrows——"

He ended the sentence with a shrug of his big shoulders.

"Mohamed Ali kept his word. Hmph! To the letter," he added, a little grimly.

"*Allah kerim!*" exclaimed the American. "*Allah kerim!*"

There seemed to be nothing else to say.

"And," continued the bandit, "within the hour Aïsa the One-Eyed will return to Anghera, aided by the night. Before then there are matters which need my attention, so I will bid you farewell."

He rose slowly.

"Perhaps," he added, "perhaps you will not feel kindly toward me—in spite of the ending of the game," he offered.

Travers jumped to his feet and held out his hand, which was quickly grasped by Mohamed Ali.

"It is not for me," he said, "to question the methods, nor, I suspect, to try to understand them."

"Time was required," explained Mohamed Ali, "for many things. Had you been free—" his smile was friendly—"you would have been—hmph—in the way. Besides—I think you would not have been living today. Although, of course—" he hesitated a little—"of course, the Hand of Allah controls us all. Will you stay in El K'sar—in Morocco?" he asked.

Travers answered absent-mindedly, thinking of something else.

"In El K'sar a little while. In Morocco—I do not know."

And then he asked the question in his mind.

"Who—" he looked Mohamed Ali in the eye—"who is the Hand of Allah? The Master of the *Djinnoon?* Or the Sultan? Or—Mohamed Ali?"

The outlaw answered with a slow but positive shake of his head and smiled faintly.

"Not Mohamed Ali," he said. "But the answer to your question is hidden from us all. *Selaama.*"

"*Selaama.* Go with God," repeated Travers, and stood watching the door close behind Mohamed Ali.

The CAMP-FIRE
A MEETING-PLACE for READERS, WRITERS and ADVENTURERS

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

A NUMBER of letters have come in on whether John Wilkes Booth, assassin of Lincoln, was really killed as commonly believed or escaped to live under a new name. Here are two; others will come later. The first rather scouts the idea of Booth's escape. I read Col. Baker's book as a boy, but my copy is gone.

Highland Park, Michigan.

In the Camp-Fire of the June 20th issue I note the inquiry of Comrade E. Schaller of Milwaukee regarding the death of John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of President Lincoln.

COLONEL BAKER of the U. S. Secret Service states in a book published some 40 or 50 years ago that John Wilkes Booth was shot by a Sergeant Corbet or Corbett in a barn to which he had been traced. I regret that this book is not at present available, being at my father's home, so can not give the exact location as given by Col. Baker. However, I believe it was near Fredericksburg. Col. Baker also gives added information regarding identification of Booth's body, laying stress upon the fact that the actor, having broken a leg in leaping from Lincoln's box to the stage, was leaning on a crutch at the time he was shot. Col. Baker also states he personally saw to the burial of Booth, taking the body in a rowboat out on the Potomac River, but expressly states that he and his one assistant, whose name at present I do not remember, have never divulged whether Booth was buried in the river or on land and would never do so. It is hard to believe that Col. Baker with the abundant sources of identification at his disposal could have made so grievous an error. Nevertheless in *True Confessions Magazine* about two years ago I saw an article giving the Texas man's story. This one was illustrated with photographs and if the man claiming to be Booth was an imposter the resemblance is almost unbelievable.

If Comrade Schaller is still interested, he can undoubtedly get a copy of the magazine from the publisher, Cap. "Billy" Fawcett, and I will try to obtain for him any further information from Col. Baker's book if he will write me.—R. A. MURDOUGH.

The second letter, from one of our Camp-Fire Station Keepers, ventures no opinion but presents some very interesting points:

Tryon, North Carolina.

Regarding the rumor that John Wilkes Booth escaped death after Lincoln's assassination.

When I was in Oklahoma City some twenty years ago, a gambler by the name of R. L. George died and papers were found in his possession which might lead one to believe he was Booth. In any case he had been in close touch with members of the ex-Confederate Cabinet and letters were discovered showing that at different times he had received large sums from men prominent during the life of the Confederacy.

THIS same R. L. George ran a gambling house in San Antonio, Texas, for a number of years, "The Washington" I believe, and was tangled up in varied and numerous gun-battles, being instrumental in the taking off of Ben Thompson and King Fisher, two rather noted exponents of beating the other fellow to it *via* the .45 Colt route.

Secret service men investigated the rumor at the time of George's death and reported it as a false lead, but I do know that all sources of information were suddenly shut off and the body disposed of *muy pronto*.

TWO years ago I was in south Maryland, and talked to many old-timers who knew Booth, Mrs. Cassatt and others implicated in the escape of Booth. I visited Dent's meadows where he made the crossing to Persimmon Point across the Potomac. There seems to be a definite understanding in that section that the man killed by Sgt. Corbett near Fredericksburg *was not* Booth. This rumor is hard to trace, as most rumors are. In fact to this day no one in that section seems to want to talk freely about the matter.

Father Matthews at Chapel Point, Md., whose father was accused of being implicated in the plot, told me that Mrs. Cassatt had absolutely nothing to do with Booth's escape, but she was convicted and hanged because it was proven that he changed horses at her place.

John Payne, of Washington, and incidently an *Adventure* fan, was raised near Fredericksburg and he tells me that it was generally believed that Booth escaped, and that a negro was burned and the reward collected on his carcass.

THIS is all hearsay—it might be possible to have some one look up the newspaper files in Oklahoma City and get the straight dope on George's death. Anyway his leg had been broken in the same place as Booth's—his appearance tallied—letters indicated he was Booth—and somebody put the *soft pedal* on the story mighty quick. Take it for what it's worth.

Incidently Booth was never hanged, as your mention of the event in *Adventure* might indicate. He was supposedly shot while hiding in a barn, the barn burned and his remains afterward identified.—HOWARD A. SHANNON.

IN CONNECTION with his article in this issue here is something from Fred Halsey that will be of particular interest to Scotchmen and to all soldiers of fortune:

In hunting up as much as I can find about the Macbanes I find the inclosed in Chambers' old history. You'll be interested in his language. This beyond doubt proves Gol Macbane's statements about his family. I used to think he was fictionizing when he told the tales of the family—but he seems to have told the truth and lived up to tradition. Or died up to tradition, which is finer.

From Robert Chambers' History of the Rebellion in Scotland: "Another Highlander signalized himself in a still more remarkable manner. He was a man of prodigious bodily strength; his name Golice Macbane. When all his companions had fled, Golice, singled out and wounded, set his back against a wall and, with his target and claymore, bore singly the onset of a body of dragoons. Pushed to desperation he made resistless strokes at his enemies who crowded and encumbered themselves to have the honor of slaying him. 'Save that brave fellow' was the unregarded cry of some officers. Poor Macbane was cut to pieces, though not till thirteen of his enemies lay dead around him."

These Macbane folks sure were adventurers and fighters. The last Golice I happened to know quite well and it was from him I got most of the yarn.

Since 1921 I hadn't heard of him until two weeks ago when I had the letter from Jimmy Gharrity telling about Gol's death. So far as I can make out he was mixed up in it only because he thought some of the Indians were getting the worst of it and was not especially interested in the revolution.—FRED HALSEY.

THIS comrade wears his Camp-Fire button where it can't get lost:

Santos, Florida.

Coming to Florida this year, I met a fellow about 23 years of age, a fine looking lad. Well, we got to talking about magazines and I told him I was a Camp-Fire fan and he said, "Where is your button?" I said I had forgotten it and he came back with rolling up his sleeve, and what do you think he had? The emblem tattoed on his wrist as plain as day. Then we shook hands and were friends. He said he had had it on for about five years now and I think it is a good idea. That is the reason I want this printed in Camp-Fire columns.

He is some adventurer. He gave me lots of talk of several places and is altogether a good scout.—PAUL JOHNSTON.

SCIENTISTS to the rescue! What made these shafts of light?

Wichita, Kansas.

I have delayed writing this letter for over a year in the hope that I might have something to tell rather than to ask. In my search for information I have never found one person who will even admit that he has witnessed the same phenomenon, so if you will refer this to some one whom you believe can explain it I will appreciate it. I tried it on an old friend of mine who was formerly in charge of one of the Geodetic Survey Stations and he didn't know—(of course that may explain why he is no longer in that position).

Here are the facts and conditions which prevailed:

IT WAS in Sterling, Colorado, February, 1923; unofficial temperature, two below; slight breeze from the northwest; not a cloud in the sky; no moon.

Three of us stepped out of a restaurant (no, not a drop of any thing had been drunk); it was ten minutes till midnight; we went to our rooms in the hotel and speculated on the thing until twelve-twenty, at which time the phenomenon disappeared—didn't fade out, it just quit *right now*.

Sterling is a well lighted town; arc lights in the downtown section and large incandescent lights at street intersections elsewhere. When we came out of the restaurant there was a bright shaft of light like the beam from a searchligh passing straight up from every light in that town!

There was no "halo" around any of the lights; nothing but that vertical shaft of light. The shafts were very bright and distinct, yet they were "thin" enough so that the stars could be seen through them. These vertical beams were of a bluish tint and in no way resembled heavy grayish halo so frequently seen during foggy nights.

I would like mighty well to know what caused this rather striking and very beautiful effect. Whatever it is, it is not common, as I have been in all altitudes at all seasons and have never witnessed it before—nor since, either.

I overlooked stating that these vertical shafts extended upward several hundred feet—simply seemed to reach clear on up out of sight exactly as searchlight beams do.—H. R. LAUDERMILK.

MANY opinions on the Custer fight have been heard at Camp-Fire. Now we hear from a Sioux Indian, whose foster father fought in that battle and knew many others of the Indians engaged. Our Sioux comrade is particularly welcome at Camp-Fire and what he says holds exceptional interest. Though writing from California, his permanent home is the Eagle Bar Ranch, Winnett, Montana.

Mission Beach, San Diego.

Being handed a copy of *Adventure* a few days ago, my attention was especially called to the discussion of the Custer Battle, so-called "Custer's Massacre," on page 181 of date of December 30, 1923.

I note carefully all that is stated in this article and wish to take slight exception to two or three statements made therein. If I make no mistake in the interpretation of this article, it wishes to convey to the reader that "there was no survivor. Every one was killed."

BY WAY of introduction I will state that I have lived all my life among the Sioux Indians and very personally and intimately knew more than half a hundred Sioux who took part in this battle against Custer's command on June 25, 1876, near the Little Big Horn River, and have heard detailed descriptions of the battle from many different Indians who took the scalp from the Custer slain. Among the warriors who has given me a most detailed description of every phase and part of this battle was my foster father, Big Elk, who last rehearsed for me the position of the various groups of men (both Indians and soldiers) on the very site of the battlefield one afternoon in June, 1912. The same day I read for him the names on the monument. He also pointed out to me two graves on the east slope of the knoll where he counted coup. One other Indian who accompanied us was "Curley," who is known among the Sioux Indians of the Little Big Horn country as Bloody Knife and who was employed as scout by General Custer at the time of the battle. Curley was a full-blooded Indian, half Sioux, half Crow, and spoke half a dozen different Indian dialects besides fair English and French. I knew Curley well, having lived near him for 12 years and visited at his place many times. He has often told me that he was with Custer's command during the greater part of the battle but took no actual part. Once or twice he begged Custer to get away or surrender to the Indians, but he stated to me that Custer refused, saying he would stand ground and would rather die fighting than surrender or be taken alive by the Indians. When Curley (Bloody Knife) saw that the soldiers had no chance, he made for a cover and wormed his way into a bunch of brush near a group of hidden Indians, finally gaining a position among a group of Sioux back of the circle of mounted Indians who were steadily closing in on the remaining handful of soldiers left near the top of the knoll.

CURLEY took no actual part on either side and was in no way molested by the Sioux, who knew who he was and also knew he had been with Custer at the first of the fight. I also know that he talked with Sitting Bull, Red Cloud, and Rain-in-the-Face (Sioux Indians) and Two Moons, chief of the Cheyennes, after the battle, all of whom knew he was with Custer when the troop ran into the Indian camp.

Years after the battle I have talked with all of the above mentioned Indians except Sitting Bull (who was killed on Wounded Knee Creek in the winter of 1890) and they have all referred to the fact that Bloody Knife or Curley as he was later commonly known was the only survivor of Custer's command.

On one occasion some years ago I asked Curley how he got over to the Indian side without getting shot. He stated that all the Indians were friendly toward him, as he did not know that they were about to encounter a camp of Sioux and Cheyennes until they were surrounded by the Indians. (Personally I have a different opinion of his supposed lack of knowledge of the chance meeting.) I have read the names of the soldiers killed on the Custer monument many times, but do not now recall how Bloody Knife's name appears on the list.

Every Crow Indian on the Crow Reservation Montana, knows Bloody Knife (Curley) and all state that he was the only known survivor of Custer's command and that he died of pneumonia at his home on the Crow Reservation, Montana, only a couple of years ago at the age of about 80 years. The missionary and also the Indian Agent stationed at Crow Agency will verify this statement.

ANOTHER error often seen even in history is that "Chief" Sitting Bull was the head war chief of the victorious Indians. This is a gross mistake. Sitting Bull (Ta-tanka-eyo-tan-ka, literally translated Sitting Buffalo) was a member of the Hun-ka-papa band of Sioux and was an Indian medicine-man or high priest and never was a chief either hereditary or by selection. During the Custer fight he was making war medicine on a high hill some three miles from the scene of battle.

I never knew Sitting Bull personally, but knew his widow and two of his daughters, still living in South Dakota the last I heard. One of his nephews, Chauncey Yellow Robe, is at present a professor in the Government Indian School at Rapid, South Dakota. Mr. C. Y. Robe's mother was a sister of Sitting Bull.

ANOTHER question often asked is the number of Indians in the battle and how they were armed. There were about 500 tepees in the camp, which would figure out 5 to the tepee, about 2,500 Sioux; half of the warriors were mounted and had about an equal number of bows and guns. The guns contained a mixture of several makes of shell and percussion cap rifles. Among the men were also several old flint-locks, several of which were discarded or turned over to the younger braves after gaining possession of the Custer carbines and Colt revolvers, most of which were retaken by the U. S. Government from the Indians after the Wounded Knee battle. Several of these Custer carbines and Colt revolvers are still owned by several Sioux.

At home on my ranch in Montana I still have two Colt revolvers, a rifle, a broken sword, several brass uniform buttons, and a scalp which was taken from the battlefield on that eventful day in June, 1876, by my foster father.

One statement that may be of interest to *Adventure* readers is that every trooper and civilian in Custer's band was scalped except one and that was Gen. Geo. A. Custer and two reasons were accountable for his scalp not being taken. First, his known courage and bravery was respected by the Indians and also that they were superstitious about taking long, curly, red hair.

ANOTHER question often asked in connection with this battle is how many Indians were killed and what became of the dead warriors, as none were ever found the next day or so when Reno came to bury the soldiers' dead. There were about 700 Sioux and Cheyennes killed during the battle, who were all carried away and buried a day's journey from the Little Big Horn battle-ground. I have been shown the Indian burial place, but due to a promise given to the Indian who pointed it out to me, I can not tell any living person as long as the one who told me is this side of the Happy Hunting Ground.

I CAN also verify the fact that at least one white man was witness to the Custer battle. His name was Fowler (renamed Ishta-tanka, Big Eye, by the Sioux) who had been a buffalo hunter and was captured along with another friend, then less than 21 years old, by the name of Walter J. Winnett, who was called Wamble Ishta, Eagle Eye, by the Sioux. These two white hunters were captured on the Yellowstone River in Montana in the fall of 1874. Fowler was considerably older than Winnett, being more than twice his age. The younger Winnett hunter was out hunting with four Sioux when the battle took place and although Winnett heard the guns he did not arrive on the Custer field until the morning of the 26th. During the excitement among the Sioux, young (Eagle Eye) Winnett was forgotten in the hurried move to Canada and made his escape out of the Indian country and is alive and well today, owner of a large stock ranch at Winnett, Fergus County, Montana, the city of Winnett being built on his ranch and named in his honor and he will verify any part of the statements here concerning him.

However, the older buffalo hunter, Mr. Fowler (who like Winnett had married into the Sioux tribe) did not fare so fortunately as his young friend Winnett. After Winnett had made his escape, the Sioux, knowing that Fowler had witnessed the battle, was afraid he also would try to escape and rather than take any extra precaution, he was killed by Rain-in-the-Face (the Indian who fired one of the three shots that killed Custer) and Fowler, the only white man who witnessed the Custer fight, was buried somewhere in Montana, near the Alberta, Canada line.—LONE EAGLE (SIOUX).

Following this letter from a Sioux, let us have one from a white man, writing bitterly, suggesting beyond what he states, and seeming to corroborate some of the statements just made. In this case I feel warranted in printing his letter yet not giving his name. I think I can say he knew Indians.

This is my valedictory and please do not use my name, as I am too old to enter into any more controversies.

THAT officer's statement in the December 30th issue is acceptable except for where he states "there were no witnesses." How does he know? Does he or any one else imagine any white who participated was going to announce the fact? Publish that he was a deserter or a squaw-man soured on the whites? Or even today if living. Imagine yourself in such a one's position *then* or even *today*. Well then! Would *you* not keep silent for your own reputation or skin and who would accept deserters' or a squawman's word, then or now? "My lip's cracked." Again, why not publish *all* of Reno's report, not merely Custer's casualities?

Of course, the Army must save its face. It did then by making Reno the goat. Reno, who knew nothing of Indian fighting but had a good record as a brave officer in the War between the States and who saved his own battalion.

GODFREY as lieutenant and with the pack-train did not participate in the first fighting, not arriving until Reno's survivors were entrenching on the bluff.

Ask Buck Connor what the Indian survivors today say of it. They are sick and tired of being questioned and either will not say anything at all or say anything to please the querists and get rid of them.

I am speaking now from memory but I believe Reno himself says he *heard* "white men's voices" and "bugles sounded from the enemies lines." I have been told the same by Reno's men who remained with the commander and by some who took the first opportunity to put for home and mother.

I remember in particular one who was later postmaster in a New Hampshire city. City, not town. He had just enlisted in the Marines under another name. "You bet I skipped. To see those dead men bristling with arrows like a pin-cushion was more than I wanted. We could hear white men with them calling out and a bugle sounding our calls. We thought it was Custer, but it was some white with the hostiles."

NO, I was not present, a fact I deeply regret. I should liked to have followed Kopea in his rush to the lower village and followed sturdy Gall on to the field. They were fighting invaders of their homes, for all they loved, for their rights, and no commercial interest or land greed or sloppy sentimentalism of their opponents can rob them of that honor and no apologists can deprive them of the fact that Custer was out-generaled and maneuvered and out-fought by better military strategists and tacticians than himself—Crazy Horse and Gall with their equally efficient lieutenants.

That is all. Kiss this effusion goodby. I have finished. In three weeks I will be 74 and that is too old to learn new things—mainly that I do not know what I have seen or that the public wants their history on a par with their movies. I will even accept their statements (with my tongue in my cheek) that Washington never owned a hatchet, that Andy Jackson was not the greatest President, that Grant was an exhorter at Ft. Humboldt, that President Davis was captured in woman's clothes, that Columbus was an Irishman and Roosevelt a German, that six million volunteered for the German war, that the draft only raked in about a hundred thousand Mexs, that a recent president was of negro ancestry and more to the same effect. What's the use? They only believe what they want to and what pleases them.— —— ——.

A WORD from William Byron Mowery in connection with his story in this issue:

The terms captain and major are used in the common complimentary sense and not at all in the strict military sense. The R. N. W. M. P. officers, save the commissioner and the lieutenant-commissioner, had no military rank, since the M. P. was not a military organization; but the officers were commonly addressed as if they had.—Wm. Byron Mowery.

SOMETHING from the Bellingham, Washington, *Sunday Reveille* concerning Death Valley Scotty, sent in by Barry Scobee of our writers' brigade. Some things in it puzzle both him and me a bit. Please take a look.

"Death Valley" Scotty, but a shadow of his former self when he prospected for gold in the Caribou country in 1878, is treking back to the scenes of his first mining successes. Going back to recuperate, if he can, a part of the losses dropped recklessly in spending three fortunes taken out of his Death Valley mine in California, from whence he got his name.

"Death Valley" Scotty intends to leave this week for the Caribou country in British Columbia. The veteran gold miner will leave Bellingham with his pack horses on the hunt for gold as his only companions.

JUST a shadow of the robust Scotty who claims to have taken from the Caribou $20,000 daily in pay dirt in 1878, will make the present excursion into the wilds east of the Canadian Rockies, probably his last. Then the world's most sensational miner, called thusly because of his carefree fortune spending, stood five feet eleven inches, and tipped the scales at 240 pounds. The shadow of today stands but five feet six inches, and weighs but 160 pounds.

The big powerful Scotty wasted away for five years in a California hospital following a nearly fatal shooting affray with sixteen bandits in 1908. The band of outlaws attacked Scotty when he was on his way into the now famous Death Valley mine. They believed he was coming out with a "poke" worth a fortune. Scotty killed eight of the brigands but was shot seven times before the attack upon him was given up. He carries marks of the wounds today. One bullet is still buried high in his forehead, the lump of lead causing a slight puff, visible to the eye. One bullet entered his spine. That one wound caused him to spend five years in the hospital. It was during this siege that Scotty wasted away, nearly to the point of death.

IT WAS because of this siege that Scotty could not again bear the scorching heat of the desert leading to the Death Valley mine, endured alone by him. It was because of this siege that Scotty was forced to abandon the mine, still rich in gold, he claims. Others have tried to "go in" but nature forbade while she smiled on Scotty. It was because of this siege that Scotty is on the verge of poverty today when he still might have been able to be returning to his poke. Now he is forced to seek cooler climes. That is the chief reason why he is bound for the Caribou to seek his fourth fortune. The second is a belief of the old gold pilgrim that the yellow mineral awaits him. He knows the country.

Scotty, or Walter Scott, as he was known before he attracted world-wide interest, is 71 years old. Clad in his high leather boots, woolen trousers, rough flannel shirt, buckskin jacket and wide-rimmed felt hat, his weather beaten face tanned by heat and winds alike, glowing with health, he belies his age. He could pass for fifty summers.

He received a letter the other day from the Blue Ridge country in Kentucky. It was written by his mother and father. He is 111 and she 101 years old. They wished their "boy" good luck. For years the senior Scott refused his home to Scotty. He harbored the belief that Walter, when he was 21 years old, robbed his bank of several thousand dollars to outfit a mining expedition. Scott emphatically denies being implicated. Borrowing the money from friends he engineered the expedition after the elder Scott refused to grubstake him. Returning five years later he gave the parent every cent of the money stolen by the bandits who were never apprehended in connection with the crime. He was welcomed by his father and forgiven, because the parent suspected that Scotty took the money. Those close to the miner declare he is as honest as the day is long.

LAST year when Scotty drove a team from the Mexican border to Bellingham, he explored the Caribou for a Vancouver, B. C., mining syndicate to report on conditions there. He is going back, he said recently, because of the belief that the gold he saw in 1878 is still there. He ought to know. Last fall he claims to have seen traces of it in the ground not included in the property listed by the syndicate for exploration purposes. Scotty did a little exploring on his own account when his work with the Vancouver concern was completed.

Death Valley Scotty will never change until death transforms his living body to an inanimate thing. He is still a spender. Just as much so as when he gained world-wide publicity when, upon returning from the Death Valley mine in 1909, he paid $39,000 for a right-of-way over the Santa Fe railroad from San Francisco to New York, took a California cowboy jazz band to Manhattan and proceeded hilariously to "paint Broadway" with gold.

"I'm going to make another fortune and spend it before I croak," he said.

If fortune again smiles upon him, he will do just that. The reason?

There is only one Death Valley Scotty, the world's most sensational spending gold miner. That is the reason.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom O. A. Robertson stands up and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine. His brother, Frank C. Robertson, is of course already known to us as a comrade of our writers' brigade.

Chesterfield, Idaho.

It is with considerable trepidation that I rise to make my little bow before such an experienced bunch as gathers around our Camp-Fire. Nevertheless I'll try to speak my little piece and slip back into the shadows.

I AM forty years old and range-raised. And, though I confess to a fondness for the white lights of the city, for regular, every-day living I still prefer the range country where a man can pursue the even tenor of his ways with total disregard for consequences and can depend upon friendship to see him through in time of need. Not but that the cattle business is to a certain extent becoming sordidly commercial. Most of the old liners sold out and retired during the last great boom in stock prices, while others were forced out during the last panic, with the result that the stock business has gone into the hands of hard-headed and hard-boiled business men who have little thought for the romance of the business.

I RECENTLY spent two weeks on a beef round-up, and was struck with the contrast to what it was say ten years ago. Today the cowboy is a hired man only; then he was the stockman's closest friend. No longer is the top horse something to be petted and pampered, but something to be sold to the highest bidder before his value has depreciated.

In my string of five horses were two expert cutting horses, and because neither was for sale at any price I was looked upon as eccentric to say the least. Of course there are a few of the old-timers still on the range in whom the spirit of romance is not dead, but they are the exceptions instead of the rule.

I HAVE long been interested in fiction writing, principally, no doubt, because my brother Frank, whose yarns frequently appear in *Adventure*, is engaged in that occupation. A little over a year ago I had the great good fortune to have a horse fall with me and break my leg. Having nothing else to do while I was laid up, I tried my hand at story writing. My first effort was enough of a success to kindle the fires of ambition and I have been dallying with the typewriter ever since in my spare hours. As to the story in this issue the two pivotal incidents relating to cruelty to animals actually happened, though neither of them ended in a tragedy.—O. A. ROBERTSON.

ONE way of hitting with the butt. As to steel jacketed bullets, why not let our writers use the term without being criticized therefor, since, as this comrade and others have pointed out, the term is in common use and generally accepted? Should a writer be forced to delay his story while he recites the particular alloy used on a particular bullet? In most cases, I think, our writers are just as familiar with the facts of the case as are those who rise in criticism.

Elmwood, Connecticut.

A reader from Shoshoni, Wyoming, takes exception to a man being hit on the head with the butt of a six in a story. Now the author so writing may rest in peace, for this has actually been done in a fight not involving movies or fiction. The gun was not grasped by the barrel but held in the firing position and the hand brought down with a short swinging motion, the butt only traveling about a foot, but it dropped a perfectly healthy outdoor roughneck. (This happened south of U. S. jurisdiction and the man who hit was on the defensive and it saved shooting and was much less noisy.)

PER the argument over steel-jacketed bullets. This argument could go on forever, for they were made of many compositions. For example: At the Naval Training Station at Newport, R. I., under the old apprentice system the writer was taught in 1902 that the Krag Jorgensen bullet was lead with a copper jacket tinned over. That question was asked the writer in his examination before going on the training ship *Monongahela*. However, the writer has never heard this ammunition referred to except as the steel-jacketed ball in civil life. If it had a nose to spread it was called the metal patch or soft nose ball. If it was bored out in the soft nose, it was, or is, called the mushroom bullet. These are the names commonly used by the general public.—T. K. BROWN.

LET'S slip this one over on our old friend Don Wiggins of "A. A." The letter was written to me personally and maybe I'm slipping one over on Mr. Wetjen of our writers' brigade as well.

Salem, Oregon.

I see Don Wiggins has a short article in the June 10th number. He mentions therein that he "can throw a tin can, the common tomato sort, into the air with my right hand, pull the pistol from my pocket with the same hand, throw off the safety and hit the can twice before it reaches the ground."

I'd like to say, in case there are any doubters, that I've seen this done. As you know, I live only about two hundred yards from Don Wiggins' Camp-Fire Station. One day he took me out in the woods and showed me some real shooting. He threw up a

Prince Albert tobacco can and hit it twice before it reached the ground, in the manner he describes. He did this with both a .45 automatic and a .45 Colt's revolver. I've never seen speed like it. He did it, too, "fanning" his gun.

He repeated the same feat with a .22 rifle, firing from the hip and getting me to throw the can for him. I've seen him empty a revolver in a tree with a piece of paper pinned to it (said paper about two inches square) at a distance of at least twenty paces, walking away from the tree, turning suddenly, drawing and firing.

DON is a wizard with guns. I thought I'd seen some shots, but he has them all beaten. His friends tell me that he's slow now compared to what he used to be. In the days when his limbs were supple and his back lithe he could put three shots into a tomato-can before it hit earth. Not that he's slow now. He can draw a bead and fire with astonishing quickness, taking off the extreme top tip of a fir tree before you can say "Bo!" Fact.

I wanted to say this so that you'd believe all he says of himself, and he's —— modest. Added to all the above, he has the second or third finest collection of arms in the State. I advise any Camp-Fire man headed this way to drop in and see them. See me, too, if they want to sprawl on a broad veranda and hear some wild yarns of the sea.—ALBERT R. WETJEN.

P. S.—Don doesn't know I'm writing this or he'd shoot me.

AT A former Camp-Fire I called our civilization an almost wholly materialistic one—a "practical" one—and challenged any one to prove that advance in that kind of civilization meant anything except more inventions, more money, more greed. An anonymous comrade writes that he is surprized I've never heard the fact that all wars and wrongs against peoples are caused by necessity—belly hunger. The law of the universe, says he, will always remain. "Kill or be killed; eat or be eaten."

His surprize is misplaced. I've been hearing these so-called facts for many years. That's what's the matter with me—I'm sick and tired of hearing them. And I don't believe them. Economic determinism is a —— lie.

I grant that "Eat or be eaten" is the fundamental of our present "practical" materialistic civilization. Myopic thinkers invented and developed the theory of economic determinism. Whether our "practical" civilization is a result of that invention or whether the invention is merely one of our "practical" civilization's many unsound and evil brain children, I don't know. Egg first or chicken first, it doesn't matter.

Man's brain is even more fallible than his liver. One of its bad habits is that of seizing upon one phase of a subject, making it the sole cause and reason for everything and ignoring all the other phases or factors. Everything comes from belly-hunger. With fully as much reason along comes the Freudian school claiming everything comes from sex impulse. Neither theory can be true if the other is. Both are half-baked.

Nearly every time some human crawls off and goes into deep meditation on the why of things in general, messing around in abstractions and generalities, his first step—an unconscious one—is to turn his back on simplicity and common sense, and his last step is to emerge with a half-truth around which he insists upon arranging the entire universe. The next "thinker," equally wise, emerges with *another* half-truth and centers everything around *it*. The next with another, and so on forever. The only thing they agree in and are correct in is that each says all the others are wrong.

MY OWN theory is that the human brain (my own included, of course) isn't worth a —— in solving life. About all it's good for, at its highest and rarest, is to reason out that it is not the instrument for the job and to start hunting for what *is* the instrument. Incidentally, it can pick out the fallibilities in the attempts of other human brains. It is mostly a negative instrument—can find what is not rather than what is.

It can, for example—if it tries—find out what is wrong with economic determinism as an explain-all. Very simply. A people is composed of people. (That's *too* simple for deep thinkers. That's what's the matter with most deep thinkers—their scorn of simplicity.) A lot of individuals is merely a lot of individuals. The principles controlling all are merely the principles controlling each. If you can look inside any normal specimen and figure out what controls him, you will know what controls all of them.

All right, look inside yourself and figure out what controls you. Just belly hunger? Just sex-impulse? Can you conceive of no situation in which you'd go hungry, starve, even die for some *other* thing? Would you die rather than see your friend, mother, wife, little child die? Or rather than do something so shameful that you would be scorned by all men?

But the real test lies in such choices

actually made by humans. How many millions of people have died for a "cause"? Rather than betray their country or their friends, rather than forswear their religion? How many have given their lives for others? How many rather than endure shame or ignominy?

What became of belly-hunger in these cases? Wiped off the map as a governing impulse.

ONLY the best of humans are capable of such non-belly choice? True. An animal, let us say, *is* governed by belly-hunger, or sex-impulse, or both. Now either one of two things: as we rise above the level of animals we develop higher controlling impulses, or else there are in us higher impulses that are the cause of our rising above animals. Take your choice. In either case the measure of our rise above the animal level is measured by the extent of our attaining higher aims than the filling of our bellies. The human who would let his child die to save his own life, or see his wife ravished rather than risk his life in her defense, or betray his country or religion or friend to save his own life, has merely failed to advance much beyond the animal—or perhaps has sunk lower.

Animals live by economic determinism, let us say. (Personally I don't admit even that. They are capable of self-sacrifice and self-sacrifice is incompatible with economic determinism as ruling impulse.) If we, too, live by it alone, we, too, are animals or little better. In proportion as we abandon that principle of living, we advance beyond animals.

We, as a race, have advanced beyond animals. If we deliberately choose and live by economic determinism, we head ourselves back to the animal level. In proportion as we hold other aims in life than filled bellies, we shall advance.

Economic determinism *can* rule the world. It doesn't yet. It will if we all insist on it. So would head-hunting if we insisted on it as the most important thing in life.

There's a difference between an impulse and an aim, between cause and purpose. Perhaps the economic determinists have forgotten that. Either cause or purpose will produce results. Perhaps what the economic determinists, the "practical," materialistic people are really saying to us and to themselves is "Let's make full-bellies, wealth, the chief aim in life. Then it will be our controlling impulse."

WHAT they forget to say is that by so doing we shall send ourselves down to destruction, practical as well as spiritual. Every nation in history that has adopted that aim has sent itself down to destruction.

Doubtless the upholders of that principle can take all kinds of exception to my arguments, find many flaws in them. My arguments being from a human brain, I have no very high opinion of them myself. Nor of their arguments either. At least mine have the advantage in that they've undertaken the comparatively easy job of showing up other human arguments, while theirs have undertaken to solve all life, all the universe, by trying to shape it to one puny, lonely, half-baked idea out of their own miserable human brains.

I have another advantage over them, too. Tomorrow I can go down to the back lot on my farm, look at the old black sow and say to myself that I have on the whole a somewhat higher aim in life than she has and seem to be moved, at least occasionally, by higher impulses. The economic determinist can't say that. If he did, the old black sow would be justified in barring him entirely from her set because, in addition to being a hog, he'd be a liar.

BECAUSE we have adopted the practise of returning to the artists their original paintings for covers for the magazine it will no longer be possible for us to offer the used canvases for sale to the highest bidders and the cover auction will be discontinued from now on.

SERVICES TO OUR READERS

Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

Camp-Fire Stations: explanation in the second and third issues of each month. Full list in second issue of each month.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons, etc., runs in the last issue of each month.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure*, mostly free, are open to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 24 T Wharf, Boston, Mass., can supply Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL BUY: November 1910, May 1911, February 1912, March 1913 and April 1915 at your own price.—Address F. C. CONNERS, 1300-1600 North Branch Street, Chicago, Ill.

WILL SELL: 150 issues from 1918 to date. What am I offered?—Address M. B. FULLERTON, Short Beach, Conn.

WILL SELL: All Feb. to Oct. 1916; all Feb. to Aug., Sept. 3rd, Oct. 18, Dec. 18, 1917; all 1918 to date, in excellent condition. Ten cents per copy.—Address W. S. CHAPMAN, 24 Union Ave., Portland, Oregon.

WILL SELL: All 1921 and 1922, sixty-three issues, covers intact. What is the best offer?—Address A. C. BOWMAN, 91 Englewood Avenue, Detroit, Mich.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscripts. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

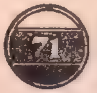
When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the second issue of each month. Address letters regarding stations to J. Cox.

Camp-Fire Buttons



To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

(See Lost Trails in the next issue)

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

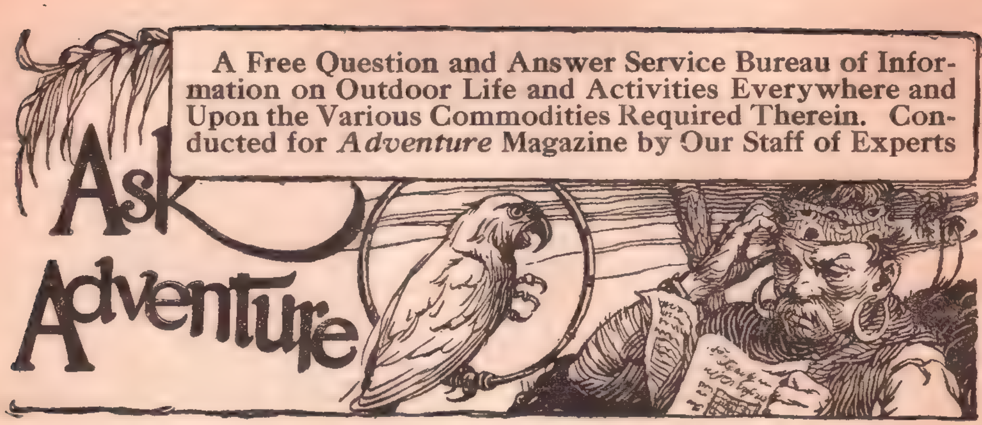
This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Addresses

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure.")



Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts

QUESTIONS should be sent not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.

1—3. The Sea. In Three Parts
4, 5. Islands and Coasts. In Two Parts
6, 7. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
8. Australia and Tasmania
9. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
10. New Guinea
11. Philippine Islands
12. Hawaiian Islands and China
13. Japan
14—17. Asia. In Four Parts
18—25. Africa. In Eight Parts
26. Turkey
27. Asia Minor
28—30. Balkans. In Three Parts.
31. Scandinavia
32. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
33. Great Britain
34—36. South America. In Three Parts
37. Central America
38, 39. Mexico. In Two Parts
40—46. Canada. In Seven Parts
47. Alaska
48. Baffinland and Greenland
49—54. Western U. S. In Six Parts
55—58. Middle Western U. S. In Four Parts
59—64. Eastern U. S. In Six Parts
Radio
Mining and Prospecting
Weapons, Past and Present. In Three Parts
Salt and Fresh Water Fishing
Forestry in the United States
Tropical Forestry
Aviation
Army Matters, United States and Foreign
American Anthropology North of Panama Canal
First Aid on the Trail
Health-Building Outdoors
Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada
Standing Information

Kiln-Drying Spanish Cedar

WHAT cigar-boxes are made out of:

Request:—"I have been employed in the production of red Spanish cedar in Central America and Mexico.

The method was to square the logs roughly by hand and allow to dry in the sun. I have often wondered if it would not be possible to dry-kiln this wood in slabs of one and one-half to two inches thick. Would this in your opinion be possible, and if so where could one get information of methods, temperature, time of drying in kiln, etc.?

I am also somewhat interested in a timber known as *sabino*, which grows in western Mexico to a considerable diameter and height. Do you know the American name; and what it is mostly used for?"—W. WILSHIRE, Las Vegas, Nev.

Reply, by Mr. Barbour:—There is no reason why Spanish cedar could not be kiln-dried successfully, though it is more difficult to dry thick slabs than it is inch boards. The trouble is to avoid "case-hardening," *i.e.*, drying the surface before the moisture has been driven from the heart, which causes it later to check and crack very badly as the inside moisture breaks its way out.

The slabs would have to be put in the kiln and subjected to steam until all the moisture was vaporized; then the steam must be gradually replaced by hot, dry air.

But it seems to me there would be no special object in placing the wood on the market in slabs rather than in squared logs. Nearly all Spanish cedar is utilized for cigar boxes, etc., in very thin boards, which are made by the sawn-veneer process, where the thin sheets are cut by extremely thin-gage circular saws. Some is produced by slicing from a thick flitch which has been steamed. In either case, the manufacturers want a thick flitch or square, so as to avoid the delays of mounting and demounting from the carriage. There is also less waste from using thick slabs than from thinner ones.

I don't recognize *sabino* from the name you give it. Local names are very confusing. If you would describe the tree and the wood I might be able to dentify it.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

A Questionnaire on the Hawaiians

WHERE there's an extinct volcano whose crater is big enough to contain the city of London:

Request:—"I would greatly appreciate such information as you are able to give me regarding the following questions.

1. Has any history or story covering the lives of the old chiefs of Hawaii, both before and after the time of Kamehameha the Great, been published? If so, what is the title? The author? The publisher?

2. Is there any complete work concerning the religion, the customs and the daily life of the Hawaiian people from the time of Captain Cook's first visit until modern times? If so, what is its title? Author? Publisher?

3. What is the most-to-be-credited account of the settlement of the islands? By this I mean originally, not the present status. On whose work do you base your opinion?

4. Are there any authentic records of the lives of the dozen or so white sailors who deserted, or left, Cook's command and took up their homes with the natives? Title? Author? Publisher?

5. What trees, flowers, fruits, etc., are indigenous to the islands? What animals?

6. When were other trees, fruits, flowers, etc., and such quadrupeds as are now found there first introduced?

7. What meat did the natives eat before the introduction of beef, etc.? What fruit? What fish?

8. Are dogs indigenous? Hogs? If not, when were the teeth of these animals first used for the decoration of idols? Why, if there is any special reason?

9. How many men were usually carried in the big double canoes when they were expecting fighting with hostile tribes?

10. Can you give me a description of these canoes? Of their weapons?

11. What minerals are found on the islands? When were they first used by the natives?

12. After battle or in time of war did the victors torture their prisoners?

13. What about the 'House of Bones' built in Moanalua? Who built it? Why? When?

14. On what Government department should I call for free literature concerning the islands?

15. Where can I purchase an English-Hawaiian dictionary? About what should it cost?

16. What books other than those mentioned above would prove of interest to one desiring to learn *all* about the Hawaii of fifty and more years ago?

17. What did the natives hunt? How did they catch fish in the traps of stone walls? What were their sports? How did they gamble?

18. What type of vessel did Kamehameha I build for sandalwood trade with China? Were they built in the islands or elsewhere? If in the islands, where? Were they manned by native crews? White deck officers? Carry any armament?

19. Did the native chiefs use flags or banners as standards? Can you describe some of those of the most famous?

20. What can you tell me of the geological history of the islands?

You will see by the questions with which I have burdened you that I am desirous of learning all about the islands that I can. In this quest I have already read the following books, or portions of them which related to those subjects in which I am most interested: 'Hawaii's Story,' by Queen Liliuokalani; 'Our Hawaii,' by Charmian K. London; 'History of the Hawaiian People,' by W. D. Alexander; and am now trying to get 'The Lepers of Molokai,' by Jack London; 'Hawaii,' by Isabella Bird Bishop.

I am enclosing postage for answer."—JAMES B. MCCARTHY, U. S. S. *Canopus*, care of Postmaster, San Francisco, Calif.

Reply, by Mr. Halton:—I want to compliment you on the conciseness and thoroughness with which you ask questions. Some of them, of course, I can answer only in a general way and by referring you to the books published on the subjects, as it would be impossible to answer you fully within the confines of an ordinary letter. I will take your questions as you have numbered them.

1. "Hawaii, Past and Present," by W. R. Castle, published by Dodd, Mead & Co., Fifth Ave., New York, gives a great deal of reliable information. You understand that there was no written language in Hawaii prior to 1820, and consequently the early history has been handed down by word of mouth for countless generations. It was the custom for each chieftain to have in his retinue a *mele* singer who, of course loudly and possibly exaggeratedly, extolled the deeds of his own particular chief so that it is probable that these stories as handed down from father to son were inaccurate and boastful.

The Rev. Mr. Westervelt of Honolulu has published from time to time "The Legends of Hawaii," which are intensely interesting and which he has obtained in the main from some of the old Hawaiian residents. As stated, it is difficult to arrive at the proper distance between fiction and fact.

2. Alexander's "Brief History of Hawaii," which I note you already have, gives a fairly complete and accurate record of the early Hawaiians.

3. I think that Alexander's history quotes Fornander as to the origin of the settlement of the islands. That is, generally speaking they are Polynesians and are believed to have originated in India, traversing the Malay States through Java to the islands of Oceania, thence to the South Sea Islands, Fiji, Samoa and the Society Group.

ONE of the old *meles*, or poems, recites the story of the voyage of Hawaii-Loa in an open double canoe and that "the moon rose and set six times" after leaving the Society Islands before the snow-capped mountains of Hawaii came into sight. It is estimated that this event took place about 500 A. D. and that on several successive trips they brought to Hawaii from the Society Group, sugar cane, taro, hogs, goats and dogs.

4. The history of the sailors who deserted Capt. Cook and remained in the islands is somewhat obscure, the only accepted instance being that of a man named Young who landed from Captain Vancouver's expedition and taught Kamehameha the arts of then modern warfare.

5 and 6. As a matter of fact there are no indigenous trees, flowers or fruits as the islands are all of volcanic origin. Seeds must have been conveyed there by the wind and birds from other lands; but you can obtain full information in a volume written by Prof. W. Bryant and published, I think, by A. C. McClurg Co. of Chicago. It is possible that you may find a copy of this book at the library. There is also a good article entitled "Floral Species of the Hawaiian Islands" by A. S. Hitchcock and published in the annual report of the Smithsonian Institution for the year 1917, pages 419-462. Perhaps you can obtain this also at your library or from the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.

7. This is partially answered in answer to question three. Apparently the waters of the islands have always been stocked with fish, and that is the principal article of diet. The fish have all Hawaiian names, and the most plentiful are barracuda, tuna and mullet. There is a good article written by Vaughn MacCaughy entitled "Food Plants of Ancient Hawaii" published in *Science Monthly*, January, 1917.

8. I suspect, although I do not know precisely, that the teeth of hogs and dogs were used to decorate their idols to give them a more ferocious appearance.

9. I believe from twenty-five to fifty men was the capacity of the big double canoes used by ancient Hawaiians.

10. These were of *chia* trees hewn out with stone implements. They were fastened together by double outrigger to give stability in heavy seas. The weapons of the men were spears with points made of either stone or fish bones.

11. There are no minerals found in the islands. For this reason history relates that the Hawaiians first clashed with Captain Cook's men in 1778 because of their theft of a boat, which was stripped of its iron ware. Because there are no minerals is the reason there are no poisonous plants or reptiles to be found anywhere in the islands.

12. I suspect that, as usual with savage races, the victors tortured the vanquished in time of war; but the Hawaiians were never cannibals.

13. I lived at Honolulu and curiously never heard of the "House of Bones" built at Moanalua; but undoubtedly it refers to some of the ancient Hawaiian graves. They used to place their dead in caves or make holes in the face of inaccessible cliffs for the purpose of depositing the remains so that their enemies could not steal the bones, which were used as *kahili* staffs.

14. The Hawaii Tourist Bureau, Fort Street, Honolulu, T. H., will be glad to mail you literature descriptive of the islands.

15. Lorren Andrews some years ago completed an Hawaiian dictionary, and this is now being revised by the Board of Commissioners of Public Archives, Honolulu. You can write to them for information as to the progress they are making and as to when it will be ready for publication.

16. Mr. Castle's book above referred to and a book published by the Advertiser Company, Honolulu, at $3.50, written by Albert P. Taylor, will prove good reading. Mr. Taylor has resided many years in the islands and is married to a descendant of the Hawaiian chieftains and has thus been able to gather information pertaining to the islands which may be considered as authentic as anything.

17. The hunting of the natives would be confined to wild goats. They had no firearms, although it is recorded that they used the gums of trees with which to snare birds. Fishing was a great sport and occupation.

THEY also indulged in surfboard riding. The board consisted of a plank about twelve feet long, two and one-half feet wide and two inches thick, shaped not unlike a coffin lid. They would lie on these and paddle out to the reef which surrounds the islands about three-quarters of a mile from shore. They would wait for a wave to break on the reef and so maneuver the board as to catch the wave, which propelled them ashore at a rate sometimes as high as thirty miles per hour. On the result of these races the lands of the natives would change ownership.

18. The vessels used in the sandalwood trade with China were ordinary sailing ships built in Europe or America and usually manned by Europeans.

19. I am not aware that the native chiefs used flags or banners. Cloth was scarce and mostly used for loin-cloths. It was made by beating the pulp of certain leaves and trees and was dyed with the distillation of flowers, leaves and bark. This is the commodity known as *tapa* cloth.

20. As stated, the islands are entirely volcanic in origin. The geologists state that the volcanic fires first ceased on the island of Kauai to the north and that these fires were successively subdued on the islands of Oahu, Molokai, Maui, Lani and Kahoolawe in the order named. At the present time the island of Hawaii contains one continuously active volcano and another that is intermittently active.

The largest extinct volcano in the world is on the island of Maui and is called Haleakala (House of the Sun). This is eight miles in diameter and over twenty-one miles in circumference. It is over 10,000 feet high, and in its huge crater could be placed the city of London.

Kilauea is the active volcano on the island of Hawaii and is located on the slope of Mauna Loa about 4,000 feet high. This statement of progressive volcanic formation is borne out by the erosion and disintegration of the lava. On the island of Kauai, which is called "the Garden Isle," the foliage is very much more beautiful than that of the other islands, while a great area of the island of Hawaii is still a black mass of lava.

Trust that this will give you the information you desire. If I can be of any further service will be glad to hear from you.

About Colts

ALSO a few words on the relative merits of double as compared with single action revolvers:

Request:—"I am thinking of buying a Colt revolver and would like your advice as to what model and caliber to get. Please advise me as if you were buying one for yourself. What model in the .44 caliber is best? What model in the .38 caliber is best? What length of barrel do you recommend for all-around use?

Do you prefer open or shoulder holster? Double or single action? Do the Colt people still make the old frontier model .44 S. A.?"—EUGENE ZIEGLER. Duluth, Minn.

Reply, by Mr. Wiggins:—For your use, if not contemplating the purchase of one solely for self-defense, I will recommend that you select an Army Special, caliber .38 Special, with five-inch barrel and walnut grips, not checked. This is to my notion the best Colt made in medium weight and power. Of course the old .45 is just the last word in effectiveness as far as the revolver is concerned, but it's a trifle heavy unless you expect to mix it with something bad, and the .38 is a wee bit more accurate, with less recoil, report and cost of ammunition. It would be my choice personally.

For the .44 caliber I would select a .44 special Single-Action Army with 5½-inch barrel and plain walnut grips. Some like the .44—40; but as it's strictly a rifle load and seldom procurable with lead bullet and smokeless powder—a very desirable combination, I may add—I prefer the special, a wonderfully accurate and powerful load.

There is no doubt that the officer's model in .38 special caliber has all the refinements; but I like a stationary sight, and for that reason advise as in No. 1.

For my personal use I like a 5-inch or 5½-inch barrel, although most shooters here use the 6-inch barrel. I do as well with the 5-inch; and it's quicker to swing on a mark, I find, as well as to carry in the holster. It certainly has "punch" and range, too.

For the belt I prefer an open-top holster; but for the shoulder the "Hardy Quick-Draw Special," one of which I use with my .45 Colt and Smith & Wesson, and prefer to any other I have tried. I advise you to send to Captain Hardy, at 2345 Elm St., Denver, Colo., and secure his list of holsters, etc., as he made me the best outfit I have ever seen. It's not to be compared to the shoddy stuff sold in some stores either, but is real art.

As to double or single action, it's merely a matter of choice; the double action is a little swifter for the first shot, but the single action has the better grip. I like the reliable operation of the single action, but have never had any serious trouble with double actions. I believe the old single action with its rigid cylinder fastening will stand more abuse than the double action's swing-out cylinder, however, and keeps in better alinement between cylinder and barrel. But both are good; use your own judgment there.

Yes, the Colts make the old Frontier or Single-Action Army in .32-40, 38-40, .44-40, .44 special and .45 Colt calibers. They formerly made it also in .32 short and long, .38 short, long and special, .41 short and long, and .22 caliber. These last four sizes are no longer made.

This replies to the questions asked, but I'll give a little more unasked advice. Get a Marbles cleaning outfit, revolver rod, that is; use good Marbles or Remoil in cleaning the revolver, and any good light oil for the lock. Pearl or ivory grips are pretty, but the pearl is apt to chip and break, while the ivory is very expensive.

My pet revolvers have gold-bead front sights, brazed to the regular blade and with the end toward the eye perfectly flat instead of rounded, as the rounding ones made me shoot away from the light, while the square ones always center the light well, being either clear yellow or else clear dark.

In case you decide to order your revolver direct from Colt's, ask them to target it for you and to send you the target made with it; thus you will know the gun to be perfectly accurate, and have more confidence. If I make a poor shot, I can blame none save Ol' Man Wiggins, for I *know* my guns to be perfectly accurate.

How to Test Gold

TWO or three simple methods:

Request:—"Is there some way to find out if one can tell what kind of mineral it is at home without any expense?

What does gold look like, and where is it generally found; in a creek bed?

I would like to find out this as a dollar is a lot of money in this part of the world.

Where could I send samples if I could not tell at home?"—ROY GETZ, Bierman, N. D.

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—To test gold, dig the point of a knife into it, and if it powders it is not gold. Gold is richly yellow; but to tell it from pyrites when in very minute flecks, turn it so that the light catches it from various directions. Gold will not alter in shade, but pyrites does. A drop of nitric acid will cause a fuming on pyrites, but does not affect gold.

You must pan creek sands and gravels to find gold. It may be near surface, but generally the heaviest deposits of placer gold are on and close to bed rock, which may be a few feet or many feet deep. Gold placers are best found in a big bend in a creek which allows it to be deposited, or on the upper side of a reef or ledge crossing the stream. Sometimes it is a dry deposit, up where the stream formerly flowed, and is called a "bench" placer. I enclose an article which gives some data on placers.

Get "The Miner's Guide," by Horace J. West, 340 Wilcox Bldg., Los Angeles, Calif., price $1. It gives a lot of prospecting dope in small space. Get "Dana's Manual of Mineralogy," by Wm. Ford, published by John Wiley & Sons, N. Y. C., $3. It tells about all the minerals and how to test them. If you want minerals tested, or assayed—and that is the only way for any one really to know—mail a sample to Richard McCarthy & Co., 56 East Granite St., Butte, Mont., or to Walter E. Burlingham, 1915 Lawrence St., Denver, Colo.

Gold is worth a little more than $20 per troy ounce and is paid for at mints or smelters at the rate of about that price after refining.

The Government Forests

HOW to get a job as a ranger:

Request:—"About how many acres of land are devoted to forestry in the United States? What are the important factors in caring for the trees? Are the men in charge required to have any special education pertaining to forestry?

Do you think a person could learn anything about forestry if one were to work in a forest? How would a person go about it to get employment in connection with forestry?

Please do not have my name put in print."—R. S., Camp Vail., N. J.

Reply, by Mr. Ernest Shaw:—Roughly speaking, there are about 150,000,000 acres within the National Forests of the United States maintained by the Government. A minor part of this area occurs in small units along the Appalachian Range from Georgia to the White Mountains of New Hampshire. Most of it lies west of the Mississippi with a few exceptions such as the Ozark Forest in Missouri and the Florida Forest in that State. In addition to the areas devoted to forest conservation by the Government there is a comparatively small acreage devoted to forestry purposes by private parties, such as that being used for the growing of chestnut railroad ties by the Pennsylvania Railroad.

The Government Forests are in charge of a supervisor who usually has from five to ten year-long Forest Rangers under him, the number depending on the size of the unit. In summer, or during the field season, this number is augmented by the employment of temporary men—guards, patrol men, lookouts, fire-fighters, etc.

The supervisor generally has the assistance of a technically trained forester and sometimes more than one. These foresters are graduates of the various forestry schools, the leading one of the country being that of Yale, although most college now offer such a course. More and more as time goes on, supervisors and rangers are and will be required to know the technical side of forestry, either through schooling or home reading as well as field training.

To obtain a permanent position with the Government Forest Service, one must take and pass with a rating of seventy or better, a civil service examination, details of which can be obtained by writing the U. S. Civil Service Commission, Washington, D. C. These examinations are usually held in the latter part of each October, and the commission will supply on request, a list of the cities and towns where given.

This examination is not a particularly difficult one to pass. Many men prefer to work on some National Forest for a season or two before taking it. By so doing they naturally pick up much information of great use to them at examination time. It consists of a written test which you are given six hours to complete; and no one knows beforehand what the questions will be. The man giving the exam. breaks the seals on the papers before the class.

If you are interested in summer work on the forests, I may be able to help with advice as to kind of work and location, if you will give me your age and the nature of the work you are now doing and have done for the past five years. A brief outline of yourself and experience is what I would need. Of course, no department of *Adventure* undertakes to place men or actually to find positions for them.

I almost overlooked your question about the care of the forests. The first duty of the men of the Forest Service is to prevent forest fires from starting and from spreading when started. This is some job in itself and will be as long as human beings are careless with fire in the woods. The practise of silvicultural methods in the cutting of timber sold, by marking the matured trees for cutting and thus giving the thrifty younger growth a better chance for development, is one way and is the next work of importance; but hand in hand with these first two are many other lines of work which often for a period assume proportions of almost equal importance—the supervision of the grazing use of the forests of the west being one such. The supervision of the recreational use of the forests is another, and it is growing rapidly. People are more and more seeking the National Forests for recreational use in the summer months.

You will recognize the difficulty in trying to cover the field of forestry in the United States in one or even several short letters such as this. Yet I trust that I have been able to touch on some of the matters in which you are interested.

If you will write the Forester, Forest Service, Washington, D. C., for a copy of the Use Book, a reading of that booklet will give you much more than I possibly could in many letters, but I shall be glad to answer any further questions which may occur to you, on request.

Chances in China

CONNECT with a job before you leave home:

Request:—"I would like to know about China; what its advantages are for a young man of twenty years? Are there any chances for employment in this country? I speak two languages, German and English.

Would like to live in China for the rest of my life. And I would also like to know about the climate and general living conditions; in fact anything you can give in the way of information that I can use.

I am thinking of coming out there about next year and would like to know whether you would advise it or not."—STEPHEN J. GANNON, Poughkeepsie, N. Y.

Reply, by Dr. Twomey:—There is no chance in China for a young man twenty years old or for a young man of any age unless he is a highly trained specialist of some kind.

The best chance for you is to get in touch with some American firm which maintains branches in China and endeavor to secure a position from them. There is almost no chance for a man to secure a position here as most of the people here are sent out by firms at home.

If you have a trade I would advise you not to come here expecting to find work at that trade. An American mechanic can not compete with the Chinese and Russians who work for wages that would not be sufficient to feed you.

Living in China is expensive. Food and servants are cheap; but the other things are so high that they make up for the low cost of food and servants, and unless you are assured a job at twice the salary that you are making at home, the best thing that you can do is to hold on to your present job until you can secure a definite offer from some firm doing business in China.

Your knowledge of English would be good in the larger cities but would not carry you very far outside of these cities, and I fear that there would be no demand for your knowledge of German. Out here when we want to employ a man to speak a certain language, we employ a native of that country, and the woods are full of people speaking almost every known language. For example I employ an office girl who speaks five different languages, and the salary that she receives would not keep you in tobacco.

If you want to write me again and tell me what qualifications you have I will try to send you more detailed information.

A Living in the Mackinac Country

SOME of the many ways to make money out of doors along the coast of the upper Great Lakes:

Request:—"Would like some facts concerning the land near the Mackinac Straits on the St. Ignace side.

I have some experience in farming, logging, trapping, and am a machinist in a small way.

I have enough to buy a couple of hundred acres near St. Ignace on the lake shore. Would it be possible to make a living from the land? It is cutover land. Some trees; none are over eighteen inches in diameter; about ten acres cleared. Any dope you can send will be very much appreciated. I have a family—four children, two to twelve years old."—CLYDE WAGNER, Toledo, O.

Reply, by Mr. Spears:—I hate to tell a man yes or no about such a proposition as yours. Livings are made off a lot less land than two hundred acres, and in regions worse than that in the Mackinac country. But it depends on the individual.

You would have lake fishing. You might cut some salable timber, especially ties and rough stuff. You might catch some furs if it's not too closely trapped there—and Michigan has been badly overtrapped. Some shooting; meat. And a readiness to make a little here, a little there, might get you to muskrat fur-farming, perhaps raising chickens and otherwise piecemealing and odd-jobbing along.

I like the Great Lakes region very much. You might raise fruits, notably apples, and perhaps strawberries and other kinds—blackberries and raspberries—and sell them at the big resorts, which might well be glad to have reliable fresh, even canned, home fruit. Maple trees might yield you a lot of sirup or sugar.

Or you might perhaps put most of your money out at interest and take only an acre or two of land and get by odd-jobbing, with the income.

You see, it all depends on yourself. It all starts from your own capacity. You might on the lake shore, establish a small boat-building plant—motorboats, skiffs—and make money that way, especially if you have the timber on your own land. I don't know. I have seen men making their livings just that way under must unfavorable circumstances apparently—but still making something, enough to save a bit.

You could go there for a year, not buying but looking it over, trying it first. Always, I think, it is best to see a place every week of the year before settling down to it. Good luck.

Trapping in the Great Slave Lake Diotrict

FOX country:

Request:—"I am going North to trap next winter. I would like to know how trapping is on the northeast side of Great Slave Lake. Is it mountainous country, or is it flat? And what kind of fur is there?

How far is it to the Barren Land from Great Slave Lake going northeast? Is there any river running into Great Slave Lake from the northeast? If there is, is it big enough for me to take a canoe up it; and how far could I go upstream?

Is it good trapping on the Barren Lands? Are there lots of white fox, and are they hard to trap? Do white fox migrate?

Are there lots of white men and Indian trappers there, or is there any place open for trapping? Would I find better trapping at Great Bear Lake? How is the country there, and what kind of fur is it there?

How far is Great Bear Lake from Mackenzie River? How many traps ought I to take along, and what size? How long a trapline ought I to run?

How much does the average trapper make in Mackenzie? How many dogs ought I to take along?

Would I have to get a license for the Northwest Territory, or would one for Alberta do? How much would a license cost?"—OSCAR NEGAARD, Prince George, B. C.

Reply, by Mr. Hague:—I imagine there should be good trapping in the Great Slave district, the fur bearers being those common to northern Canada—fox, wolf, bear, wolverene, ermine, marten, fisher, mink, etc. The country is fairly well wooded; and though there are hills it could not be described as mountainous. It is not far removed from the beginning of the Barren Lands.

You can take train to Edmonton, thence on to Fort McMurray by rail and from there by river right into Great Slave Lake. Steamboats run during the summer months on regular schedule up the Athabasca River, and once you leave the steamer you will have no difficulty in finding rivers to travel by.

White fox are plentiful in different districts in different years; but I understand the territory you are interested in is pretty good fox country as a general rule, except during rabbit-plague seasons, etc. There are fur-trading posts distributed throughout the whole of the north country and all kinds of trappers, every year seeing more of them drifting into the country.

Trapping is a hard game. The expense of outfitting is high, and very few inexperienced men make nearly enough to cover their grubstake. Unless you are well provided with funds and don't mind being disappointed I wouldn't chance the trip. Great Bear Lake is on a tributary of the Mackenzie River, and I imagine conditions there are pretty similar to Great Slave Lake. I would advise starting out in the fall in order to be on the grounds before they freeze up, get your cabin built, etc.

A dog team usually comprises five to seven dogs.

Write Game Guardian, Edmonton, for copy of game laws, particulars of license, etc. I think an Alberta non-resident license is $100 and Northwest Territories non-resident license $200. Presume you would need the latter, which could be secured through Mounted Police, Edmonton.

The Original Flatheads

THEY have history and legends:

Request:—"I am interested in the early history of the Mission Range in the northwestern part of the State of Montana, and I notice in *Adventure* that you are an authority on the history of this State.

I passed through that section about two years ago, and since then I have read several stories which were supposed to have happened in the Mission Range. I also understand that this has been the scene of many a bitter cattle war. My curiosity is aroused, and it is about as large as an old maid's, and so I am asking you to send me what you can of the early history and early characters of this section, also titles of any books which I may use for reference.

I realize that I am asking you a great deal and I am leaving it to your judgment in answering. I am enclosing a stamped and addressed envelop. If published kindly do not use name."—R. M. H., Tulsa, Okla.

Reply, by Mr. Davis:—I am afraid the early history of the Mission Range is not as interesting as you have been led to believe. Whatever you may have read about it being the scene of bitter cattle wars was pure bunk. It was Indian country from the earliest days until the Flathead Indian Reservation was open to settlement about 1910. The Indian name of this range was Sin-Yal-Min, and you can only glean its history incidental to the history of the Flathead Indians. Titles of books pertaining to the Flathead tribe, some of which make considerable reference to the Mission Range are: Smead's, "The Land of the Flathead," published in 1905 by the Pioneer Press of St. Paul. Father De Smet's, "Oregon Missions" and also his "Western Missions." Major Ronan's, "History of the Flathead Indians." Father Palledino's, "Indian and White in the Northwest." Helen Fitzgerald Sander's, "Trails through Western Woods."

In Government publications dealing with Indian treaties you probably would obtain some information. The most interesting history of the Mission Range undoubtedly is the Indian legends in connection with it; but I judge from your letter that you have a different impression of the history.

"ASK ADVENTURE" editors are appointed with extreme care. If you can meet our exacting requirements and qualify as an expert on some topic or territory not now covered, we shall be glad to talk matters over with you. Address F. K. NOYES, *Adventure*, New York.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Mass.

SEVERAL replies have already come in with additional verses to the 1812 war song printed in the issue of November 10th. The most complete version was sent by Mrs. J. H. Spaulding of Arizona, who says in part: "I am sending one version of 'The Noble Lads of Canada.' It was written off by my mother's grandmother, whose husband fought in the War of 1812."

Although this is in no sense a folk song, it deserves a place in our collection both because of its interest, and because of its age and rarity. I print first Mrs. Spaulding's version, then certain verses not included in her text. The latter are from a rare "songster" of the 1850-60 period.

The Noble Lads of Canada
(*Text sent in by Mrs. J. H. Spaulding.*)

Come all you noble Canada lads, I pray you lend an ear,
Draw up your British forces and then your volunteers,
For we're going to fight the Yankees, boys, by water and by land,
And we never will return till we conquer hand in hand—
We're the noble lads of Canada,
Come to arms, boys, come!

(*See verse* (*A*) *as printed below.—R. W. G.*)

We're as choice a British army as ever crossed the sea,
We'll burn both town and city and with smoke we'll cloud the day;
We'll subdue those old Green Mountain Boys—their Washington is gone—
And we'll play them Yankee Doodle as the Yankees did Burgoyne.
We're the noble lads of Canada,
Come to arms, boys, come!

Now we've reached the Plattsburg banks, boys, and here we'll make a stand,
We'll take that noble fleet which MacDonough doth command.
We've the *Growler* and the *Eagle* that from Smith we took away,
And we'll use that noble fleet that lies anchored in the bay.
We're the noble lads of Canada,
Come to arms, boys, come!

Now our frigates' hove in sight, my boys, the cannons boldly roar,
With death upon our cannon-balls, we'll drench their decks with gore,
We've water craft sufficient for to sink them in an hour,
But our orders are to board them and the Yankee flag deflower.
We're the noble lads of Canada,
Come to arms, boys, come!

Now the battle's growing hot, my boys,—don't know which way it'll turn
While McDonough's boats on swivel (hinge?) Continental doth turn.
If we lose the cause by sea, my boys, we'll make a swift return
Or as sure as hell is hell, my boys, we'll all be gone before
We can get back to Canada,
Stand to arms, boys, stand!

Old Provost sighed aloud and to his officers did say:
"I wish those devilish Yankees would sail along this way,
For I've such a constant flashing that the smoke beclouds the sky
That our larger ships are taken and our smaller run away.
Oh, we've got too far from Canada,
Stand to arms, boys, stand!

(*These last two verses are badly corrupted. Compare verses B and C as printed below. R. W. G.*)

Prepare for your retreat, my boys, make all the spread (speed?) you can,
For the Yankees are surrounding us; we'll surely be Burgoyned!
Behind the hedges and the ditches, behind the trees and every stump
You can see the sons of b—s and the cursed Yankees jump.
Oh we've got too far from Canada,
Run for life, boys, run!

They told us that the Federals were friendly to the crown,
That they'd join the royal army and the Democrats pull down,
But they all unite together like a band of brothers bound,
And they'll fight for independence till they die upon the ground.
We're the noble lads of Canada,
Stand to arms, boys, stand!

Now we've reached the Plattsburg's heights, my boys, we'll make a short delay,
For to rest our weary limbs and to feed our beasts on hay.
Soon McDonough's cocks began to crow; 'twas heard from Stark's barn,
And following of this came the general alarm.
Oh, we're still too far from Canada,
Run for life, boys, run!

(*See verses D and E as printed below. R. W. G.*)

Old '76 they sallied forth, on their crutches they do lean,
With their rifles leveled at us through their specs they take good aim.
For there's no retreat from those, my boys, who'd rather die than run,
And I make no doubt that these are those that conquered John Burgoyne
When he got too far from Canada,
Run for life, boys, run!

Now we've reached the Cherry Heights, my boys, we'll have a day of rest,
And I wish to God that I might say 'twould be a day of mirth,
But I've left so many troops behind it causes me to mourn,
And if ever I fight the Yankees again, I'll surely stay at home.
Now we've got back to Canada
Stay at home, boys, stay!

Here's a health to all the Yankee (British?) boys, likewise to George Provost,
To all our wives and families and the girls that love us most,
To McDonough and McComb, and to every Yankee, boys,
Fill up your bumpers full, for I never was so dry!
Oh we've got back to Canada,
Stay at home, boys, stay!

Additional Verses
(From the "Nancy Till Songster," n.d.)

(A) O now the time has come, my boys, to cross the Yankee's line,
We remember they were rebels once and conquered John Burgoyne,
We'll subdue those mighty Democrats and pull their dwellings down,
And we'll have the States inhabited with subjects of the Crown.
We're the noble lads of Canada,
Come to arms, boys, come!

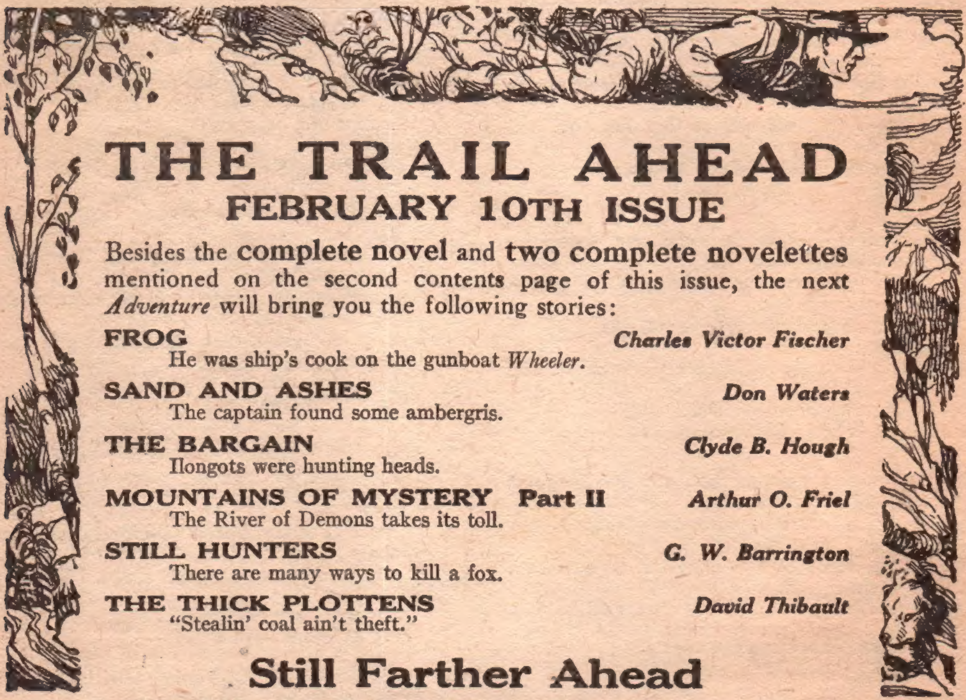
(B) Now the battle's growing hot, my boys, I don't know how 'twill turn,
While McDonough's beats on swivels hung, continually do burn,
We see such constant flashing that the smoke beclouds the day,
And our larger boats they've struck, and our smaller run away.
O we've got too far from Canada,
Run for life, boys, run!

(C) O Provost he sighed aloud, and to his officers said,
I wish the Devil and those Yankees could but sail alongside,
For the tars of France and England can't stand before them well,
For I think they'd flog the Devil and drive him back to hell.
O, we've got too far from Canada,
Run for life, boys, run!

(D) Provost sighed aloud and to his officers did say,
The Yankee troops are hove in sight and hell will be to pay.
Shall we fight like men of courage, and do the best we can,
When we know they will flog us two to one—I think we'd better run.
O, we've got too far from Canada,
Run for life, boys, run!

(E) Now if ever I reach Quebec alive, I'll surely stay at home,
For McDonough's gained a victory, the devil fight Macambe,
I had rather fight a thousand troops as good as ever crossed the seas,
Than fifty of those Yankees behind the stumps and trees.
O, we've got to far from Canada,
Run for life, boys, run!

SEND all contributions of old songs, and all questions about them, direct to R. W. GORDON, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Massachusetts. DO NOT send them to the magazine.



THE TRAIL AHEAD
FEBRUARY 10TH ISSUE

Besides the **complete novel** and **two complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

FROG — ***Charles Victor Fischer***
He was ship's cook on the gunboat *Wheeler*.

SAND AND ASHES — ***Don Waters***
The captain found some ambergris.

THE BARGAIN — ***Clyde B. Hough***
Ilongots were hunting heads.

MOUNTAINS OF MYSTERY Part II — ***Arthur O. Friel***
The River of Demons takes its toll.

STILL HUNTERS — ***G. W. Barrington***
There are many ways to kill a fox.

THE THICK PLOTTENS — ***David Thibault***
"Stealin' coal ain't theft."

Still Farther Ahead

THE three issues following the next will contain *long* stories by Larry Barretto, Thomson Burtis, Arthur D. Howden Smith, Hugh Pendexter, James Parker Eldredge, Frederick Moore, Leonard H. Nason, L. Patrick Greene, and J. Allan Dunn; and short stories by G. W. Barrington, L. Paul, Thomas Topham, Alan Le May, Barry Scobee, John Webb, Ernest Lyons, E. S. Pladwell, Michael J. Phillips, H. C. Montee and others; stories of aviators in the oilfields, doughboys on the western front, vikings in the fjords, bush lopers in the border colonies, white traders in the South Seas, cowboys on the western range, mounted policemen in Rhodesia, pirates in the Caribbees, adventurers the world around.

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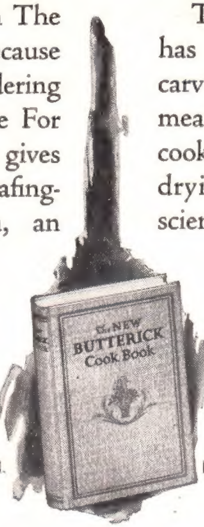

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